

# EDUCATION REFORMS: ENSURING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IS ACCOUNTABLE TO PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

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## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND THE WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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EDUCATION SYSTEM IS ACCOUNTABLE  
TO PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES**

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**Wednesday, September 21, 2011  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,  
Elementary and Secondary Education  
Committee on Education and the Workforce  
Washington, DC**

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The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Duncan D. Hunter [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hunter, Kline, Biggert, Foxx, Goodlatte, Hanna, Roby, Kildee, Payne, Scott, Holt, Davis, Hirono and Woolsey.

Staff Present: Jennifer Allen, Press Secretary; Katherine Bathgate, Press Assistant/New Media Coordinator; Heather Couri, Deputy Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Lindsay Fryer, Professional Staff Member; Daniela Garcia, Professional Staff Member; Krisann Pearce, General Counsel; Mandy Schaumburg, Education and Human Services Oversight Counsel; Dan Shorts, Legislative Assistant; Linda Stevens, Chief Clerk/Assistant to the General Counsel; Alissa Strawcutter, Deputy Clerk; Daniel Brown, Minority Junior Legislative Assistant; Jody Calemine, Minority Staff Director; John D'Elia, Minority Staff Assistant; Jamie Fasteau, Minority Deputy Director of Education Policy; Brian Levin, Minority New Media Press Assistant; Kara Marchione, Minority Senior Education Policy Advisor; Julie Peller, Minority Deputy Staff Director; Melissa Salmanowitz, Minority Communications Director for Education; Laura Schifter, Minority Senior Education and Disability Advisor; and Michael Zola, Minority Senior Counsel.

Chairman HUNTER. A quorum being present, the subcommittee will come to order.

Good morning, and welcome to our witnesses. Thank you for being here. We appreciate your time and you coming to join us.

Good morning, and welcome to today's subcommittee hearing. I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today. We appreciate the opportunity to get your perspectives on how States and local school districts can ensure public schools are held accountable to parents and communities for improving student achievement.

We can all agree a strong accountability system is vital for effectively monitoring and improving student achievement. However, the current system under elementary and secondary education law is failing. Decades of growing Federal intervention in the Nation's classrooms have done little to boost student achievement levels and make our schools more successful. Instead, we now face a system in which the majority of public schools will soon be labeled as failing. It is time to reexamine the way schools are held responsible for preparing children for success.

The four components of the existing Federal measure of accountability, academic standards, assessments, adequate yearly progress and school improvement, constitute a one-size-fits-all approach that is ineffective in gauging the performance of schools. Not only is this Federal accountability system entirely too rigid, it also fails to take into account the various challenges facing unique schools. Instead of allowing State and local leaders to develop innovative solutions to improve area schools, the Federal system established by No Child Left Behind requires all schools failing to make AYP for 2 consecutive years or more to follow the same overly prescriptive set of interventions.

It does not matter if the school narrowly missed the mark in achieving AYP or if the school failed by a large margin, the Federal improvement remedies are nonnegotiable. It seems obvious that the problems facing a rural school in Alaska are probably very different from those facing a school in inner-city Los Angeles, which is even different from a school in San Diego. A one-size-fits-all process developed by Washington bureaucrats is extremely unlikely to adequately and efficiently address the needs of both institutions.

Just last week the full committee heard from a panel of education officials about the appropriate Federal role in ensuring accountability. These experts agree the current system does not offer the flexibility necessary to address circumstances at the State and local level. As one witness stated, "The arbitrary bar and lack of flexibility has made it difficult for States to advance bold accountability agendas that serve their schools and students well."

Instead of forcing a narrow and inflexible system on States and school districts, the Federal Government should encourage State and local officials to create new approaches for measuring student achievement and engaging parents and community members in the performance of schools. Over the past few months, members of this committee have heard countless stories of the innovative ways communities and States are working to more effectively monitor student progress, motivate parents to play a more active role in their children's education, and improve the transparency of important school performance data. The more we can encourage this kind of grassroots engagement in our schools, the better the result.

In my home State of California, some 1,300 schools are persistently failing. Rather than stand by and wait for the Federal Government to do something about it, parents have been banding together to demand change in their local schools.

Thanks to a groundbreaking "parent trigger" State law that allows a majority group of parents to spur reform in an underperforming public school, more communities have been inspired to take action. For example, the law empowered parents in Compton

to push to overhaul a failing public elementary school by turning it into a charter school. Already States like California, Texas and Connecticut have enacted parent trigger laws, and several other States are considering similar proposals. This is just one example of how folks on the ground are taking matters into their own hands to ensure schools are held accountable for student performance.

The witnesses here today have fresh ideas about improving accountability and student achievement at the State and local levels. They have an intrinsic knowledge of the needs of their communities and students, and we should listen carefully to their thoughts and ideas as we work to redefine the Federal Government's role in school accountability. I look forward to a productive discussion on this critical issue with our witnesses, as well as my committee colleagues.

[The statement of Chairman Hunter follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Duncan Hunter, Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education**

Good morning, and welcome to today's subcommittee hearing. I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us today. We appreciate the opportunity to get your perspectives on how states and local school districts can ensure public schools are held accountable to parents and communities for improving student achievement.

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The witnesses here today have fresh ideas about improving accountability and student achievement at the state and local levels. They have an intrinsic knowledge of the needs of their communities and students, and we should listen carefully to their thoughts and ideas as we work to redefine the federal government’s role in school accountability. I look forward to a productive discussion on this critical issue with our witnesses, as well as my committee colleagues.

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Chairman HUNTER. I would now like to recognize the ranking member Mr. Dale Kildee for his opening remarks.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for calling this subcommittee hearing. I was impressed by the quality of our discussion on accountability issues in the full committee last week and look forward to an in-depth discussion today.

I like the use of the subcommittee. For a while subcommittees were kind of falling into desuetude, but it is nice that we are really reactivating them and have them play a role in writing legislation.

I am pleased to welcome the witnesses to this hearing. Thank you for taking time from your very busy schedules to provide us with guidance on how we should strengthen accountability and where that should be centered or where it should be spread.

The No Child Left Behind Act called for the disaggregation of data for low-income students, minority students, students with disabilities, and English language learners and shed light on the inequalities in our education system. Prior to the law, achievement among these students was masked or hidden by the system. A call for information and accountability was the right thing to do.

Unfortunately, the one-size-fits-all approach of current law did not do enough to close the achievement gap. We need to give States the support and the flexibility they need, while still ensuring equal opportunity for diverse student groups. I hope we can adopt an approach that rewards growth and progress so we can better focus our resources on the districts and schools that need help moving students forward.

What level of direction might come from the Federal Government to create coherence in a system, maintain accountability and increase student achievement? I fundamentally believe that education is a local function, a State responsibility, and a very, very important Federal concern. And that has been early on in our country, the development. The Michigan Constitution says the legislature shall provide for a system of free and public schools, and then gradually the local school districts were reformed by the State government. Then the Federal Government, because we live in a very mobile society, there was a role for the Federal Government.

We are competing in a global economy also, and what will give us the edge in that competition is an educated populace. So I think if we can keep that balance of a local function, a State responsibility and a Federal concern—and we may disagree how much weight should be given each one of those. That is basically what



we would agree upon is the three components, three elements, who have a creative interest in education.

Increasing equity in education is crucial for our Nation's economic success, we know that. I remember a few years ago in Flint, Michigan, we had to—in order to keep the Buick plant open at that time, we really had to retrain workers. And much of that retraining was reeducating. We found that there were—some people functionally illiterate who were able to perform, but not really in the new technology. So they had to—we gave some Federal aid there, too, to help reeducate,—retrain these people to operate in that new economy.

So I look forward to the testimony today to see how we can improve accountability, see where accountability should be focused, and the role of the various levels of government in education. I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HUNTER. I thank the ranking member.

[The statement of Mr. Kildee follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Dale E. Kildee, Ranking Minority Member,  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for calling this subcommittee hearing. I was impressed by the quality of our discussion on accountability issues in the Full Committee last week and look forward to an in-depth discussion today.

I am pleased to welcome the witnesses to this hearing. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to provide us with guidance on how we can improve student achievement and strengthen accountability.

The No Child Left Behind Act called for the disaggregation of data for low income students, minorities, students with disabilities and English language learners and shed light on the inequalities in our education system. Prior to the law, achievement among these students was masked or hidden by the system. The call for information and accountability was the right thing to do.

Unfortunately, the one-size fits all approach of current law did not do enough to close the achievement gap. We need to give states the support and flexibility they need, while still ensuring equal opportunity for diverse student groups.

I hope we can adopt an approach that rewards growth and progress so we can better focus our resources on the districts and schools that need help moving students forward.

What level of direction might come from the federal government to create coherence in the system, maintain accountability, and increase student achievement? I fundamentally believe that education is a local function, a state responsibility, and finally a federal concern.

Increasing equity in education is crucial for our nation's economic success. Our future global competitiveness rests on the education of our students and ensuring that all of our nation's students graduate ready to compete. I look forward to the testimony today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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Chairman HUNTER. Pursuant to committee rule 7(c), all subcommittee members will be permitted to submit written statements to be included in the permanent hearing record. And, without objection, the hearing record will remain open for 14 days to allow statements, questions for the record and other extraneous material referenced during the hearing to be submitted in the official hearing record.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our distinguished panel of witnesses. First, Dr. Benny Gooden has served as superintendent of the Fort Smith Public Schools in Fort Smith, Arkansas, since 1986. He was installed as president-elect of the American Association of

School Administrators in July 2011 and will assume the presidency in 2012.

Dr. Jay P. Greene is department head and 21st Century Chair in Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. Greene conducts research, and writes about education policy, and is the author of the book *Education Myths*.

Ms. Laura W. Kaloi is a public policy director at the National Center for Learning Disabilities, where she has led NCLD's advocacy program since 1999.

And Mr. Bill Jackson founded GreatSchools in 1998. GreatSchools compiles data on school performance and educational resources in order to inform parents as they interact with their child's school and weigh educational options.

Welcome to you all. Thanks for taking the time to be here. Before I recognize each of you to provide your testimony, let me briefly explain our lighting system. You will each have 5 minutes to present your testimony. When you begin, the light in front of you will be green. When 1 minute is left, it goes yellow. And when you are out of time, it goes red. And I would ask you to wrap up your remarks as best you can when the light goes red. After everyone has testified, Members will each have 5 minutes to ask questions of the panel.

I would now like to recognize Mr. Gooden, Dr. Gooden, for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF BENNY L. GOODEN, SUPERINTENDENT,  
FORT SMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS**

Mr. GOODEN. Thank you.

Chairmen Hunter and Kline, Ranking Member Kildee, members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee today. My name is Benny Gooden. I am superintendent of the Fort Smith Public Schools in Fort Smith, Arkansas. I currently serve as president-elect to the American Association of School Administrators.

Fort Smith is an urban community located on Arkansas' western border with Oklahoma. Fort Smith Public Schools serve more than 14,000 students. The demographic characteristics include a district poverty rate approaching 70 percent, almost 5,000 students with non-English home languages, and an ethnic mix which results in no single group majority in the district or in more than half of the district's 26 schools.

Students entering our schools bring widely differing skills to the starting line. During the past decade we have experienced every aspect of the NCLB protocol. As a diverse district with large subgroups in several areas, there is no refuge in small sample sizes to shield schools from accountability. In fact, many of our schools will present challenging students who will be counted in several different subgroups to the detriment of each. We have seen schools defy the odds and meet the targeted goals, while others face the disappointment when one subgroup or another will result in the dreaded label "failing school."

Recently we saw two of our persistently low-performing elementary schools meet standards. Both schools are more than 90 percent free and reduced lunch qualifiers, with non-English background

students in the majority. There was no simple formula they applied to make the required progress. Their success was a persistent concentration on performance data, the use of formative assessments to guide instruction, and a rich menu of in-time professional development to build capacity in a dedicated teaching staff. As for the teachers and principals, this was the hard work of public education.

We are not at the finish line, and under the current standards it is unlikely that we will ever be at the desired level of performance in every school or every subgroup.

As Congress pursues a process of ESEA reauthorization, it is worthwhile to note the successes that we have had. These include articulating the imperative to serve all children; requiring that performance data be disaggregated, and using the power of data to focus upon relative achievement needs; and emphasizing transparency regarding our results.

All of these successes should be continued and enhanced to emphasize accountability and expand that accountability to include all schools.

There are a number of issues which must be addressed in the interest of college and career readiness. These include the fact that many State assessment systems fail to instill confidence that they measure performance uniformly. While few of us would endorse a national test, moving toward a commonly accepted set of standards and assessments is needed.

Using a single test to gauge student and school success fails to support targeted teaching and leads to the mischaracterization of schools. Using multiple measures to reflect student achievement will help ensure appropriateness in testing. Adding formative assessments will make the process of assessing accountability both valid and reliable.

Using a pass-fail system in which unsuccessful performance by one or a small group of students brands an entire school or district as failing is inconsistent with what educators and the public know about groups of students or schools.

The sanctions which are included in NCLB are inconsistent with what we know about school improvement or about the motivation of professionals. Closing the school or replacing the existing principals and teachers is not appropriate or reasonable in many rural and urban settings.

An important part of the accountability system must continue to address high school completion. However, the comparative methodologies must be refined and standardized to reflect the realities of our adolescent society.

The overriding effects of poverty in many communities simply cannot be ignored.

Locally we have quickly realized that there is no silver bullet of school improvement; however, there is an array of research-based practices which will yield measured progress. Are we accountable? Of course. With a system which is transparent and coherent, and with a system which acknowledges the well-known fact that one size does not fit all, Congress can build on what we know to take our schools to where we must be. Educators want to work with you toward these goals. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Dr. Gooden.  
[The statement of Mr. Gooden follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Benny L. Gooden, Ed.D., Superintendent,  
Fort Smith Public Schools, Fort Smith, AR**

CHAIRMEN HUNTER AND KLINE, RANKING MEMBER MILLER, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE: I appreciate the opportunity to address the Committee today on issues relative to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

My name is Benny L. Gooden and I am Superintendent of the Fort Smith Public Schools in Fort Smith Arkansas. I am speaking to you with more than 45 years in public education in both rural and urban settings. I am in my 37th year as a superintendent with service in both Arkansas and Missouri. I currently serve as President-elect of the American Association of School Administrators. Fort Smith is an urban community located on Arkansas' western border with Oklahoma. The Fort Smith Public Schools serve more than 14,000 students. The demographic characteristics include a district poverty rate approaching 70% based on free or reduced meal qualifiers, almost 5,000 students with non-English home languages and an ethnic mix which results in no single group majority in the District or in more than one-half of our 26 schools.

*Understanding the Environment*

Students entering our schools bring widely differing skills to the starting line. Some have had a rich array of home and community experiences and are ready and eager learners. Others come from a background which has done little to prepare them for active academic growth.

During the past decade we have experienced every aspect of the No Child Left Behind protocol. As a diverse district with large subgroups in several areas, there is no refuge in small sample sizes to shield schools from accountability. In fact, many of our schools will present challenging students who will be counted in several different subgroups to the detriment of each. We have seen schools defy the odds and meet the targeted goals, while others face the disappointment when one subgroup or another will result in the dreaded label "failing school" as the newspapers often trumpet.

Recently we saw two of our persistently low performing elementary schools meet standards—reflecting growth of proficient or advanced students of more than 20%. Both schools are more than 90% free and reduced lunch qualifiers with non-English background students in the majority. There was no simple formula they applied to make the required progress. Their success was a persistent concentration on the performance data, the use of formative assessments to guide instruction and a rich menu of in-time professional development to build capacity in a dedicated teaching staff. As for the teachers and principals, this was the hard work of education.

We are not at the finish line, and under the current standards it is unlikely that we will ever be at the desired level of performance in every school or subgroup. However, the morale of teachers who see growth and know that they are appreciated for their work and recognized for their accomplishments will ensure continued progress. You see, we were attempting to "leave no child behind" long before that phrase was attached to a piece of federal legislation.

*Learning from Experience with NCLB*

As Congress actively pursues the process of ESEA reauthorization, it is worthwhile to note successes from the previous Act and our experiences during the last decade in schools throughout America. Some positive highlights the 2001 Act, No Child Left Behind as it is known include:

- As the name implies, articulating the imperative to serve all children made an important statement. While most serious educators understand this imperative, it has been positive to emphasize it as a matter of public policy.
- Requiring that performance data be disaggregated in order to see relative success among several subgroups heightened awareness and made educators accountable for all students. Using the power of data to focus upon relative achievement needs validates successes while bringing low performers into clearer focus.
- Emphasizing transparency regarding results has increased the awareness of stakeholders and the public regarding the need for improved student performance among all groups. This aspect of accountability will continue to engage parents and the public regarding the challenges and successes schools experience at the local, state and national levels.

These successes in the current legislation should be continued and enhanced during reauthorization to further emphasize accountability with integrity for all schools. Any federal accountability mandates should be applicable to all schools.

There are a number of issues which must be addressed in the reauthorization if ESEA is to move schools and students to increased levels of college and career readiness. Necessary changes of which educators and the public are keenly aware include:

- Many state assessment systems fail to instill confidence that they measure performance uniformly. Fifty different sets of standards and assessments to measure them simply fail to provide the evidence of performance which accountability requires. This disparity was recently reported in a Wall Street Journal article which detailed the different standards for passage relative to the only real nationwide measurement, the NAEP. This report was based on an analysis produced for the U.S. Department of Education. While few would endorse a “national test,” moving toward a commonly accepted set of standards and assessments should result in confidence that expectations—the basis for accountability—will be comparable in California, Maine, Washington and Florida—and all the states in between. This will give parents some assurance that their schools are on par with others.

- Using a single test to gauge student and school success fails to support targeted teaching and leads to the mischaracterization of schools. This factor undermines acceptance of an assessment and accountability system by educators and a skeptical public. In consideration of the range of needs students bring to our schools—from disabilities to language minority—using a single measure to determine success is frustrating to students and parents and demeaning to educators who know that this is not consistent with best professional practice. Using multiple measures to reflect student achievement will help ensure appropriateness in testing. Adding formative assessments will make the process of assessing for accountability valid and reliable.

- Likewise, using a “pass/fail” system in which unsuccessful performance by one or a small group of students brands an entire school or district as “failing” is inconsistent with what educators and the public know about groups of students or schools. This factor has been affirmed by a sequence of Gallup Polls in which an increasing percentage of the poll respondents hold unfavorable views of NCLB as a tool to improve schools. Parents and teachers find it incredible that a scorecard for adequate yearly progress can include more than 40 ways to fail with uniform consequences whether one or three dozen categories of students fail to measure up. Simply stated, it is difficult to find thoughtful educators, parents or the public who accept a 100% performance standard with onerous penalties for failure to reach the goal—regardless of the presence of many factors outside the control of the educators who are held accountable. This is not unlike assigning an aging competitor like me to run the 1,000 meter run with a prescribed time standard—and to use the same time standard for another competitor like my daughter who is half my age and who regularly competes in triathlons.

- The sanctions which were included in NCLB and which are proposed for continuation under the Department of Education blueprint are inconsistent with what we know about school improvement or the motivation of professionals. Closing the school or replacing the existing principals and teachers because a group of students has failed to reach the standard is not appropriate or reasonable in many rural and urban settings. As former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once noted in another context, “As you know, you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time.” Schools will improve student performance by supporting those teachers and principals who work there every day and by giving them the resources and building their capacity to address the student needs that emerge. We are unlikely to reach our goals by demeaning the very educators we count on to get the results.

#### *Improving ESEA for America’s Schools*

Congress can take several direct steps to ensure high standards and accountability for reaching them while building on best practices and using strategies supported by research.

#### *Assessment Strategies*

We must use multiple measures which are appropriate for the content and students being assessed. Assessing students with serious disabilities using the same instrument used on the highest academic performers is highly problematic and fails to address individual needs. Provisions for portfolio assessments have been so restrictive that they do not sufficiently address this issue. Likewise requiring students with little or no facility in English to sit for a test they cannot comprehend is counterproductive for all concerned. Great teachers agonize in disbelief at a federally

mandated policy which requires practices that they know are not only contrary to best professional practice, but which defy common sense. In this context, test design and implementation should be the purview of the states and must include adaptive assessments which are designed for the context in which they are used. This imperative mandates the use of a variety of assessment tools which are a fit for a variety of situations.

Formative assessments should be used to guide instruction and to reflect student growth over time. The current “high stakes” test administered annually for accountability is little more than an educational autopsy. Such tests are of little value in guiding instructional improvement. Similarly, using only the proficient or advanced performers as contributors to adequate yearly progress determinations diminishes the significance of assessments for those whose progress has not reached the proficient standard. These students and their teachers need the motivation to show significant growth among even the lowest performers.

In consideration of this factor, the Fort Smith Public Schools have targeted students scoring below basic on the state Benchmark exam for special attention. This targeted instruction by our best staff has resulted in a dramatic reduction of total students in this category. We are now at the point where we believe that a “zero out” goal is within our grasp. For these persistently challenged students, raising their performance to higher levels literally means the difference between a bleak future and one which presents hope and the potential for success.

#### *Accountability for Results*

Success for all schools and students must be an attainable goal. The 100% goal is noble, but it is unlikely to be achieved if rigor in teaching and testing is to be emphasized. Measuring growth is critical and must be an integral part of any accountability system. A fair and balanced system includes absolute levels of attainment with credit for growth over time. A focus on individual students and their longitudinal progress must be a component in any improved accountability system. Simply looking at different cohorts and noting their relative performance reveals very little about real progress.

The overriding effects of poverty in many communities cannot be ignored. The 2011 Kids Count data released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation documents the steady increase in the percentage of students in America living in poverty. This factor is especially prevalent in the South. A challenging economy has only exacerbated this situation. By failing to acknowledge the pervasive impact which intractable situational and generational poverty has on families and the children in our schools, we are attempting to do the educational equivalent of treating an epidemic of a contagious disease by raising the requirements for health care workers and punishing them as more cases appear.

An important part of the accountability system must continue to address high school completion. The Diplomas Count project continues to document the abysmal graduation rates reflected in school districts large and small across America. While the Fort Smith Schools have been recognized by the Diplomas Count report as “beating the odds” and “overachieving” and while we lead large districts in our state, our performance is not enough. Nonetheless, when the completion methodology is finalized, it is essential that factors outside the control of schools be considered. Just as a four-year college degree is a faint memory for which parents dream in today’s higher education market, so a rigid four-year high school cohort measurement is inadequate. Consideration must also be given to career and technical students whose apprenticeship or modified instructional programs vary from the traditional norm. The entire methodology must be refined and standardized to reflect the realities of our adolescent society.

High school improvement is a heavy lift. At the core of improving high schools must be enrolling more students into more challenging classes while increasing rigor in all classes. Fort Smith’s two high schools have emphasized Advanced Placement courses. While our more affluent high school has been a leader in AP enrollment and performance for many years, enrollment was significantly lower at our more diverse campus as many students believed that AP classes were for others, but not for them. Through participation in the AAIMS initiative, AP enrollment has more than doubled and the district-wide test performance has continued to be strong. Rigor pays dividends for students as we raise expectations. The data continue to support more rigor and can be used to guide students to college and career readiness.

The sanctions and models for turnaround mandated for schools which fail to reach the arbitrary adequate yearly progress goal are quite narrow and present no real choices in some communities. Washington does not know best in addressing low performance. The state education agencies can and must hold local schools accountable

for improving student academic progress in a quest for rigorous college and career readiness for every student. However, what is best for a school in rural Arkansas may be vastly different from the remedy for a school in urban Chicago. Selecting remedies is not something easily done from Washington—and sometimes, not even from Little Rock. Technical assistance to support local efforts is definitely appropriate, but a narrow menu of mandated actions has not been found to be successful.

Some of our most challenging campuses with more than 90% poverty, ethnic diversity, more than 50% limited English students, and a highly mobile population demonstrate growth—if not achieving adequate yearly progress. Various campuses find successful strategies which may vary—just as the neighborhood culture varies. The common ingredients which yield results are a committed faculty and school leadership with support from skilled professionals appropriate to the school's needs. Transforming these campuses from advanced school improvement status to achieving is a source of justifiable satisfaction to those educators who chose to work in a challenging environment.

The only way schools in Fort Smith, in New York or across America will be able to compete with those international counterparts against whom we are often measured is through a strong corps of trained teachers and school leaders. When Marc Tucker recently released a paper for the National Center on Education and the Economy comparing school reform initiatives currently in vogue in the United States with practices in the highest-performing countries, the message was compelling. All our emphasis on testing, sanctions, choice, competition and other popular trends appears to be absent in some of the highest achieving countries. Despite the many demographic and systemic differences between our nations, our successful counterparts recruit teachers from among the most able students in our high schools and colleges, compensate them well and give them the respect and support afforded to the most elite professionals in the various nations. We might want to consider some of these examples as long-term strategies to help our system of public education to improve its performance.

Locally, we have quickly realized that there is no “silver bullet” of school improvement. However, there is an array of research-based practices which will yield measured progress. At the top of the list must be a culture of instructional leadership by school principals. Building the knowledge base and helping principals to be true instructional experts is critical. In a related way, the placement of highly proficient instructional facilitators in struggling schools makes it possible to provide in-time professional development opportunities for teachers which are directly related to the student needs of the day. Collaboration opportunities for teachers and the collegial focus on school-wide instruction are also vital for improvement to occur. Specific professional development to address needs at a particular campus is a must. Many English language learners (ELL) requires training for all staff who will serve these students. The Fort Smith Schools made a significant investment of available funds in the area of professional development to build capacity in staff who serve the ELL population.

#### *Our Imperative*

In summary, public education is the vehicle which can determine the difference between bright futures and lifetimes of failure and dependency. Are we accountable? Of course! With a system which is transparent and coherent, and with a system which acknowledges the well-known fact that one size does not fit all, Congress can build on what we know to take our schools where we must be. The system leaders, building leaders and teachers in schools throughout America eagerly anticipate a positive reauthorization.

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Chairman HUNTER. I would now like to recognize Dr. Greene for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF JAY P. GREENE, 21ST CENTURY PROFESSOR  
OF EDUCATION REFORM, UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS**

Mr. GREENE. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for having me here to testify today. My name is Jay P. Greene, and I am the 21st Century Professor of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. I am here today to talk with you about how we can best achieve high standards and improve outcomes in education.

There is a large effort under way to change educational standards, curriculum and assessments by centralizing the process. This effort is based on the belief that we will get more rigorous and better student outcomes if standards, curriculum and assessments are determined, or at least coordinated, at the national level. It began with the use of Race to the Top to push States to adopt the Common Core Standards, but will also require national curriculum and assessments to be fully implemented.

I believe the centralized approach is mistaken. The best way to produce high academic standards and better student learning is by decentralizing the process of determining standards, curriculum and assessments. When we have choice and competition among different sets of standards, curriculum and assessments, they tend to improve in quality to better suit student needs and result in better outcomes.

One thing that should be understood with respect to nationalized approaches is that there is no evidence that countries that have nationalized systems get better results. Advocates for nationalization will point to other countries, such as Singapore, with higher achievement that also have a nationalized system as proof that we should do the same. But they fail to acknowledge that many countries that do worse than the United States on international tests also have nationalized systems. Conversely, many of the countries that do better than the United States, such as Canada, Australia and Belgium, have decentralized systems. The research shows little or no relationship between nationalized approaches and student achievement.

If that is true, what is the harm in pursuing a nationalized approach? First, nationalized approaches lack a mechanism for continual improvement. Given how difficult it is to agree upon them once we set national standards, curriculum and assessments, they are nearly impossible to change. If we discover a mistake or wish to try a new and possibly better approach, we can't switch. We are stuck with whatever national choices we make for a very long time. And if we make a mistake, we will impose it on the entire country.

Second, to the extent that there will be change in the nationalized system, it will be directed by the most powerful organized interests in education and probably not by reformers. So reformers—in general it is unwise to build a national church if you are a minority religion. And reformers should recognize that they are the



political minority, and so it is a bad idea to build a nationalized system that the unions and other forces of the status quo will likely control over time.

Third, we are a large and diverse country. Teaching everyone the same material at the same time and in the same way may work in small, homogenous countries like Finland, but it cannot work in the United States. There is no single best way that would be appropriate for all students in all circumstances.

I do not mean to suggest that math is different in one place than it is in another, but the way in which we best approach math, the age and sequence in which we introduce material, may vary significantly. As a concrete example, California currently introduces algebra in the eighth grade, but the Common Core calls for this to be done in the ninth grade. We don't really know the best way for all students, and it is dangerous to decide this at the national level and impose it on everyone.

I understand that there is great frustration with the weak standards, low cut-scores and abysmal achievements in many States, but this problem was not caused by a lack of centralization and cannot be fixed by nationalizing key aspects of education. Instead, the solution to weak State results is to decentralize further so that we increase choice and competition in education. If school systems have to earn students and the revenue they generate, they will gravitate toward more effective standards, curriculum and assessments.

This decentralized system I am describing of choice and competition producing better outcomes is not purely theoretical. It actually existed in the United States and helped build an education system that was the envy of the world. Remember that public education was not created by the order of the national government. Local communities built their own schools, set their own standards, devised their own curriculum and evaluated their own efforts. At one time there were nearly 100,000 local school districts operating almost entirely autonomously.

In our highly mobile society, people had choices about where to live, and communities had to compete for residents and tax base by offering an education system that people would want. Standards were raised, and outcomes improved through this decentralized system of choice and competition among local school districts.

The progress we were making in education, however, stalled when we started significantly centralizing education and reducing the extent of choice and competition among districts. The policies, practices and funding of schools have increasingly shifted to the State and national governments, and greater uniformity has been imposed by unionization. The enemy of high standards and improving outcomes is centralization.

Fortunately, the nationalization effort is still in its early stages, and there is time for Congress to exercise its authority and preserve a decentralized system for setting standards, curriculum and assessments, which is a far more effective way of producing progress in student learning.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Doctor.

[The statement of Mr. Greene follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Jay P. Greene, 21st Century Professor of  
Education Reform, University of Arkansas**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for having me here to testify today. My name is Jay P. Greene and I am the 21st Century Professor of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. I am also a fellow at the George W. Bush Institute located at Southern Methodist University.

I am here today to talk with you about how we can best achieve high standards and improve outcomes in education. There is a large effort underway to change educational standards, curriculum, and assessments by centralizing the process. This effort is based on the belief that we will get more rigorous standards and better student outcomes if standards, curriculum, and assessments are determined, or at least coordinated, at the national level. It began with the use of Race to the Top to push states to adopt the Common Core standards, but will also require national curriculum and assessments to be fully implemented.

I believe this centralized approach is mistaken. The best way to produce high academic standards and better student learning is by decentralizing the process of determining standards, curriculum, and assessments. When we have choice and competition among different sets of standards, curricula, and assessments, they tend to improve in quality to better suit student needs and result in better outcomes.

One thing that should be understood with respect to nationalized approaches is that there is no evidence that countries that have nationalized systems get better results. Advocates for nationalization will point to other countries, such as Singapore, with higher achievement that also have a nationalized system as proof that we should do the same. But they fail to acknowledge that many countries that do worse than the United States on international tests also have nationalized systems. Conversely, many of the countries that do better than the United States, such as Canada, Australia, and Belgium, have decentralized systems. The research shows little or no relationship between nationalized approaches and student achievement.

In addition, there is no evidence that the Common Core standards are rigorous or will help produce better results. The only evidence in support of Common Core consists of projects funded directly or indirectly by the Gates Foundation in which panels of selected experts are asked to offer their opinion on the quality of Common Core standards. Not surprisingly, panels organized by the backers of Common Core believe that Common Core is good. This is not research; this is just advocates of Common Core re-stating their support. The few independent evaluations of Common Core that exist suggest that its standards are mediocre and represent little change from what most states already have.

If that's true, what's the harm in pursuing a nationalized approach? First, nationalized approaches lack a mechanism for continual improvement. Given how difficult it is to agree upon them, once we set national standards, curriculum, and assessments, they are nearly impossible to change. If we discover a mistake or wish to try a new and possibly better approach, we can't switch. We are stuck with whatever national choices we make for a very long time. And if we make a mistake we will impose it on the entire country.

Second, to the extent that there will be change in a nationalized system of standards, curriculum, and assessments, it will be directed by the most powerful organized interests in education, and probably not by reformers. Making standards more rigorous and setting cut scores on assessments higher would show the education system in a more negative light, so teachers unions and other organized interests in education may attempt to steer the nationalized system in a less rigorous direction. In general, it is unwise to build a national church if you are a minority religion. Reformers should recognize that they are the political minority and should avoid building a nationalized system that the unions and other forces of the status quo will likely control.

Third, we are a large and diverse country. Teaching everyone the same material at the same time and in the same way may work in small homogenous countries, like Finland, but it cannot work in the United States. There is no single best way that would be appropriate for all students in all circumstances.

I do not mean to suggest that math is different in one place than it is in another, but the way in which we can best approach math, the age and sequence in which we introduce material, may vary significantly. As a concrete example, California currently introduces algebra in 8th grade but Common Core calls for this to be done in 9th grade. We don't really know the best way for all students and it is dangerous to decide this at the national level and impose it on everyone.

I understand that there is great frustration with the weak standards, low cut-scores, and abysmal achievement in many states. But this problem was not caused by a lack of centralization and cannot be fixed by nationalizing standards, cur-

riculum, and assessments. Instead, the solution to weak state results is to decentralize further so that we increase choice and competition in education. If school systems have to earn students and the revenue they generate, they will gravitate toward more effective standards, curriculum, and assessments.

This decentralized system I am describing of choice and competition producing improvement is not purely theoretical. It actually existed in the United States and helped build an education system that was the envy of the world. Remember that public education was not created by the order of the national government. Local communities built their own schools, set their own standards, devised their own curriculum, and evaluated their own efforts. At one time there were nearly 100,000 local school districts operating almost entirely autonomously.

When people became convinced that students needed a secondary education, these districts started consolidating to be large enough to build high schools. No one ordered them to consolidate and build high schools. They did it because they recognized that people would be reluctant to move into their community unless it offered a secondary education. That is, in our highly mobile society people had choices about where to live and communities had to compete for residents and tax base by offering an education system that people would want. Standards were raised and outcomes improved through this decentralized system of choice and competition among local school districts.

The progress we were making in education, however, stalled when we started significantly centralizing education and reducing the extent of choice and competition among districts. The policies, practices, and funding of schools has increasingly shifted to the state and national governments and greater uniformity has been imposed by unionization. The enemy of high standards and improving outcomes is centralization.

We can see this same process of setting better standards through a decentralized system in other domains. For example, in the video cassette industry there were competing standards: Betamax and VHS. If we had simply imposed a national standard through the government or by a committee of experts, we almost certainly would have ended up with Betamax. Sony, the producer of Betamax, was larger and more politically powerful than the consortium backing VHS. And experts were enamored with the superior picture quality offered by Betamax. But instead we had a decentralized system of determining the standard, where consumers could choose which standard they preferred rather than have it imposed by the government or a committee of experts. As it turns out, consumers overwhelmingly preferred VHS. It was cheaper and the tapes could play longer videos. Consumers were willing to trade-off a reduction in picture quality for the ability to watch an entire movie without having to get up in the middle to change tapes. Centralized standards-setters can't know the best way and impose it on everyone. It takes a decentralized system of choice and competition for us to learn about the better standard and gravitate toward it.

In addition, if Betamax had been imposed by a centralized authority, we almost certainly would have been stuck with that technology for a long time. We would have stifled the innovation that produced DVDs and now Blu-Ray. Choice and competition not only allows us to figure out the best standard for today, but leave open the possibility that new standards will be introduced that are even better and that consumers may prefer those in the future.

There is an unfortunate tendency in public policy to stifle this decentralized process of setting standards. Policymakers are often tempted to identify the best approach, often through a panel of experts, and then impose that approach on everyone. After all, if something is the best, why would we want to allow people to do something else? This is a temptation I urge you to resist in education. Even the best-intentioned experts have a hard time recognizing what the best approach would be. And once it is set by experts, there is no mechanism like the one we get from choice and competition for improving upon that whatever "best" standards, curriculum, and assessments are identified. Essentially, what we are talking about is the danger of central planning. It doesn't work in running the economy any more than it would in running our education system.

Fortunately, the nationalization effort is still in its early stages and there is time for Congress to exercise its authority and preserve a decentralized system for setting standards, curriculum, and assessments. I should emphasize that the movement toward a nationalized system has not been voluntary on the part of the states. It was coerced by the U.S. Department of Education as a condition for receiving Race to the Top funds and I fear that coercion may be continued with the offer of selective waivers from No Child Left Behind requirements.

I hope that you will help restore our decentralized system of setting standards, curriculum, and assessments, which is a far more effective way of producing progress in student learning.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to now recognize Ms. Kaloi for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF LAURA W. KALOI, PUBLIC POLICY DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES**

Ms. KALOI. Chairmen Hunter and Kline, Ranking Member Kildee and members of the committee, I am Laura Kaloi, public policy director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities. NCLD represents nearly half of the students with disabilities in public school. I am also here in my most important role as a mom. I have three children attending Virginia public schools, including Ethan, my 11-year-old son, who has dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Fortunately, my husband and I have the education and capability to ensure Ethan gets what he needs. Although Ethan's principal had told us last year that we should just accept Cs might be good enough from someone like our son, I am happy to report that Ethan left the fourth grade with As and Bs and scored proficient and above proficient on the Virginia State assessments last June.

Today I would like to share the parent perspective about the status of people with LD, how subgroup accountability shows us that struggling students comprise more than just students with disabilities, how NCLB has helped schools improve outcomes for students with disabilities, and what Congress can do to fully support the progress of students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, contains no provisions setting high academic expectations and holding schools accountable for student progress. It is NCLB that has provided the long-needed accountability and emphasis on doing what works to improve results.

Prior to NCLB, most parents of children with disabilities had no idea where their child's reading or math performance stood as compared to their child's peers. Most students with disabilities were not included in State assessments and were not taught to State standards, and there were pervasive low expectations for students with disabilities. Today there are 5.9 million students eligible for special education in public school. The vast majority, nearly 85 percent, are classified with disabilities that by definition do not include any type of cognitive or intellectual impairment. In fact, 42 percent are students with learning disabilities. I would like to say this again, nearly 85 percent by definition and classification by our schools do not have cognitive or intellectual impairments.

2.5 million students receive services under both Title I and IDEA. Many are indistinguishable from students who do not receive special education. And, in fact, most spend more than 80 percent of their school day in the general classroom taught by general education teachers.

As reported in my organization's State of Learning Disabilities report, people living in poverty are most likely to have LD. Students with LD continue to lag behind their peers in reading and

math. And 64 percent of students with LD graduated with a regular diploma compared to 52 percent in 1999.

As you can see, we have made great strides, yet there are still families waiting for their child to be college and career ready, and achieving a regular high school diploma is the golden ticket. I want this for my son, and schools should provide this basic opportunity to every child.

Some people support the myth that it is only students with disabilities who are underperforming, and that they are the reasons schools can't make AYP, so they have proposed separate assessments and accountability mechanisms and promote that by taking students with disabilities out, data will automatically right itself. However, this just isn't true. There are millions of Black, Latino and poor students consistently underperforming in reading and math, and we aren't proposing to carve those students out. As one assistant superintendent stated in our Challenging Change report, we had an instruction problem, not a special education problem.

Longitudinal research in Alabama, Hawaii, South Dakota and Wisconsin show that certain struggling students without disabilities are consistently not proficient. These students are male, minority and poor. We must focus on the instructional challenges for all of these students, and we must face the questions about how students with disabilities fit into a State accountability system.

NCLB had a positive impact for students with disabilities primarily because schools and districts raised expectations for students with disabilities, promoted sustainable collaboration between general education and special education teachers, supported inclusive practices, assessed students with disabilities on the general assessment, and shared data with parents.

In revising the law, please build on the most valuable aspects of current law, to maintain a focus on subgroup accountability. Transparency is not enough. Include all schools in any accountability system. Identify struggling learners early through response to intervention. Allow growth models that include all students. Promote universal designs for learning. And support more training for general and special education teachers.

Yours is a difficult job. The Federal role in education is complicated. However, for parents the answer is simple. If taxes are spent to help struggling students, you must ensure that all students count in the very same way and are held to the very same high expectations.

My friends with children with disabilities, we share one common goal. Our child's academic progress should matter as much as any other child in the school building. Ethan asked me last week, "How much education do I need to be a writer, a bachelor's degree, a masters degree?" Before I could answer, he answered himself by stating, "I think more education is better, don't you?"

I hope we can embrace the goal of every child being college and career ready and focus our educational resources on this important endeavor together. Thank you for your time.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Ms. Kaloi.

[The statement of Ms. Kaloi follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Laura W. Kaloi, MPA, Parent,  
National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc.**

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee and Members of the Committee, I'm Laura Kaloi, public policy director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) where I've advocated for individuals with learning disabilities (LD) for over twelve years. NCLD represents nearly half of the students identified with disabilities in our nation's public schools. I'm also here in my most important role as a Mom. I have three children attending public school in Virginia, including Ethan, my eleven year old son who has dyslexia and dysgraphia.

Dyslexia and dysgraphia are language based learning disabilities which for Ethan, cause difficulty with short-term and working memory and this primarily impacts his ability to retrieve words from memory, remember letters and numbers in a sequence, memorize letters and numbers, write longhand and spell. Fortunately, I am a parent who, along with Ethan's Dad—who also has dyslexia—has the education, knowledge and capability to ensure he gets what he needs. He's also a very hard working boy. While Ethan's principal had told us that we should be happy with Cs for someone like our son I'm happy to report that Ethan left the 4th grade last June with As and Bs and he scored proficient and above proficient on the VA standards of learning tests in all subjects.

Today, I'm here to share the parent perspective about:

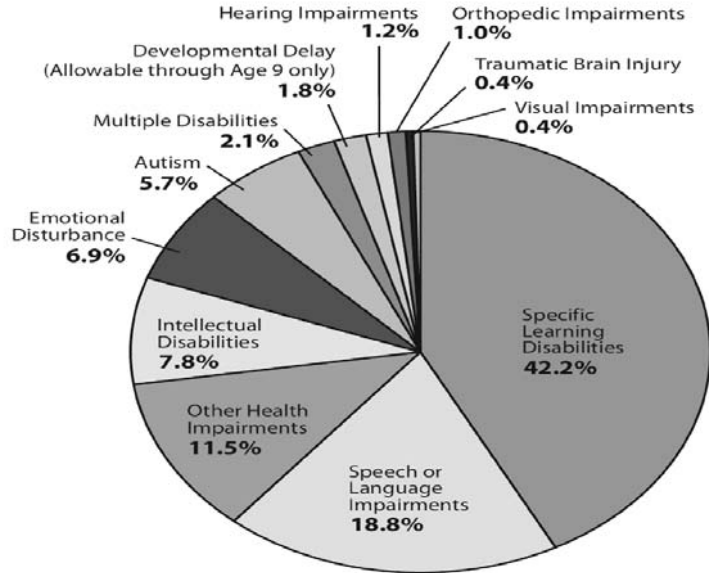
- the status of people with LD and how NCLB has promoted an increased focus and use of data in making instructional decisions for students with disabilities
- how subgroup accountability and data reporting requirements have highlighted that struggling students comprise more than just students with disabilities in today's schools
- the effective practices that schools have embraced to ensure meaningful change for all students, especially students with disabilities
- as ESEA reauthorization proceeds, what Congress can do to ensure that the progress of students with disabilities moves forward as they are educated alongside their peers.

While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities, it contains no provisions setting high expectations and holding schools accountable for their progress. In fact, in its latest reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, Congress reminded us that “the implementation of the [IDEA] Act has been impeded by low expectations, and an insufficient focus on applying replicable research on proven methods of teaching and learning” (20 U.S.C. §1400(c)(4)). It is NCLB that has provided the long-needed requirement of school accountability and emphasis on doing what works to improve results for students with disabilities.

Prior to the passage of NCLB, most parents of children with disabilities had no idea where their child's performance stood in reading and math as compared to their child's peers. Most states had ignored a 1997 requirement in IDEA law “to develop guidelines for the participation of children in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in State and district-wide assessments...” which was intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Therefore, most students with disabilities were not included in state assessment systems. Unfortunately, once NCLB was passed, pervasive low expectations for students with disabilities led some schools and districts to react negatively to the new requirements of NCLB—the thought that students with disabilities should be expected to achieve meaningful academic progress seemed completely unattainable by some school professionals. Mainly, this was due to the fact that until NCLB's passage in 2002, schools had not provided curriculum to these students that focused on state standards. It was the rare parent that had been able to ensure that their student with a learning disability was included in the core work and making progress with the additional support that special education is intended to provide.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are 5.9 million students eligible for special education under the nation's federal special education law—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—in public school today. The vast majority—nearly 85%—are classified with disabilities that by definition do not include any type of cognitive or intellectual impairment. In fact, 42% are students with LD.

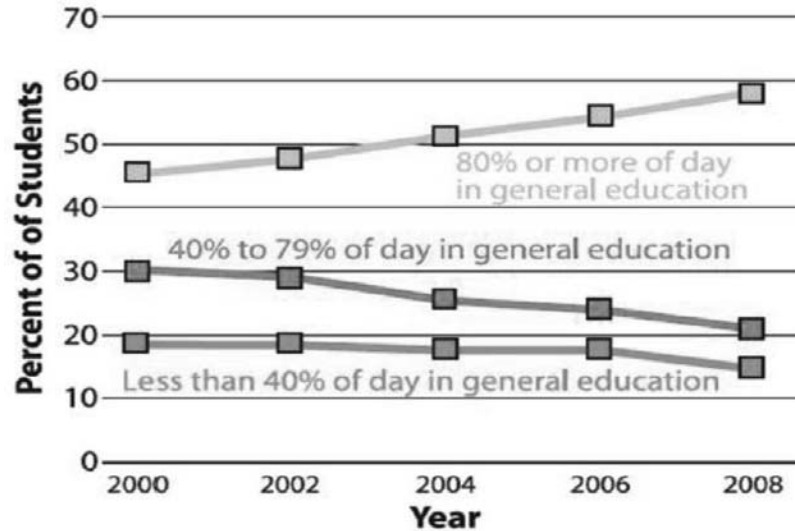
**Students Receiving Special Education Services by Disability Category**



Source: [www.IDEAdata.org](http://www.IDEAdata.org)  
 2009 Part B Child Count, Students ages 6-21, 50 states, DC, PR, BIE schools.

There are 2.5 million students receiving services under both Title I and IDEA and many are indistinguishable from students who do not receive special education services. In fact, most students with disabilities spend the vast majority of their school day in general education classrooms—taught by general education teachers—using the same instructional materials as all other students in the class. And their parents have the same aspirations for their success in life.

### Where Students with Disabilities Spend Their School Day



Source: [www.IDEAdata.org](http://www.IDEAdata.org)

As reported in NCLD's State of Learning Disabilities report:

- people living in poverty are most likely to have LD
- Students with LD continue to lag behind their peers in reading and math
- 55% of adults with LD are employed compared to 76% of general population
- 64% of students with LD graduated with a regular diploma compared to 52% in 1999 and 22% dropped out compared to 40%.

These statistics demonstrate both the good and the bad news regarding the status of people with LD. We've made good strides yet there are still thousands of families waiting to see their child experience the reality of being college and career ready. Parents know that achieving graduation with a high school diploma is the golden ticket to moving on to college or meaningful career training. I want this for my son and I want you to send a strong message to states that we should expect every child to have this opportunity.

As we all know, there are those that continue to stand by the myth that it is only students with disabilities who are struggling and underperforming and that students with disabilities are the reason schools can't make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). So, they purport that by creating a separate assessment system, a separate reporting system and accountability mechanism(s) that the data would just automatically right itself and abracadabra, we're good—every other student is on target. However, this just isn't true. As reported this year by the U.S. Department of Education:

- only 24% of schools miss AYP for just one subgroup, and of those, just 14% miss ONLY for the students with disabilities subgroup.
- Only 30% of schools are held accountable for the students with disabilities subgroup in AYP due to 'N' size.



<b>Exhibit 27</b>		
<b>Number and Percentage of Schools Required to Calculate AYP for Each Student Subgroup, 2005-06</b>		
<b>Student Subgroup</b>	<b>Schools Required to Calculate AYP for Subgroup</b>	
	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Percentage of All Schools</b>
African-American	25,807	30%
American Indian / Alaskan Native	7,503	9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	11,338	13%
Hispanic	25,602	30%
White	60,371	71%
Low-income students	55,646	65%
Students with disabilities	25,491	30%
LEP students	17,126	20%
<p><b>Exhibit reads:</b> Thirty percent of schools had a sufficient number of African-American students to require calculation of AYP for this subgroup.</p> <p>Source: SSI-NCLB, National AYP and Identification Database (based on data reported by 50 states and the District of Columbia for 85,435 schools in these states).</p>		

Since NCLB's passage, much research has been conducted and data examined to see what is really happening in schools and districts. Through the lens of disaggregated data and reporting on subgroups, we know there are millions of struggling students in schools. Such students are Black, Latino and poor and they con-

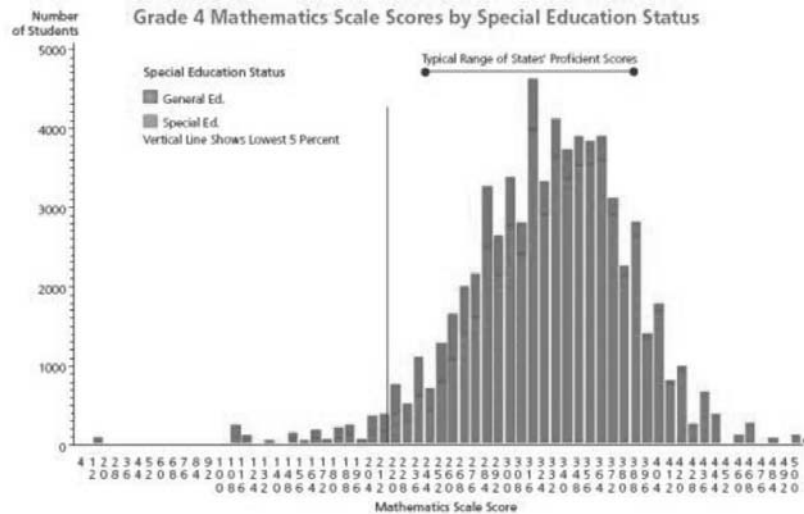
sistently underperform in reading and math—and we aren’t proposing policy fixes to carve those students out because of their learning gaps. As one assistant superintendent stated in our report *Challenging Change*, ‘we had an instructional problem, not a special education problem.’ (Cortiella, C., Burnette, J. (2008). *Challenging Change: How Schools and Districts are Improving the Performance of Special Education Students*. New York, NY: National Center for Learning Disabilities.)

Both best practice and current research show us that when principals use their data to understand how students are performing and provide teachers with the training and support they need, the difference this can make in the progress of any struggling student is monumental.

As Abigail, an 8th grader with LD said, “Finally in third grade I found a teacher that changed my life. She never gave up, even when I gave up on myself. She taught me nothing is impossible even if you have a disability.”

My son Ethan’s 4th grade teacher made this kind of difference. She connected with his interest in fantasy novels, encouraged him to tell her what was going on in his book and patiently taught him to write about it with complete and what we call ‘juicy sentences.’ She made sure he used a word processor so he could type it instead of write it and taught him that editing is just part of every good student’s life. Because of this support at school and at home, he went from a low C to a solid A in writing. This is a different kid than the one who hated school in 3rd grade.

Furthermore, longitudinal research that examined student-level demographic data in four states (AL, HI, SD, WI) showed that certain struggling students—those without disabilities—often called persistently low performing students consistently are not proficient year in and year out on state assessments. Findings show these students—in all 4 states are male, minority and poor. (Lazarus, S., Wu, Y-C., Altman, J. & Thurlow, M. 2010). Additionally, an examination of 4th grade math in one state shows us that the lowest performers are not solely students receiving special education.



As you can see, and it’s no surprise to parents—students with disabilities are even performing above the range—which is where we need to set our sites for the majority of students with disabilities.

As author of *How It’s Being Done, Urgent Lessons from Unexpected Schools*, Karen Chenoweth stated:

“I can’t even remember all the times I have heard the sentiment, “If they could meet standards they wouldn’t have a disability,” a statement that betrays both a profound misunderstanding of disabilities and the role special education services is supposed to play, which is helping to shape and scaffold instruction in order to provide access to the general curriculum.”

If we are to believe that is only students with disabilities who are struggling and underperforming in our schools, we are mistaken and being misled by those who continue to stand on this false premise. As stated earlier, it is an instructional chal-

lenge we face in this country and parents want you to help our schools do something about it.

It's imperative that we face head-on the question you have grappled with regarding how students with disabilities fit into a state's accountability system. To do this, we must be open to:

- understanding how NCLB has positively changed the landscape for students with disabilities in many schools and districts

- using the data and best practice to reframe the policy discussion

Since public opinion data show that people continue to believe that students with disabilities:

1. Cannot achieve grade level standards
2. Take the same tests as their peers; or
3. Gain a regular high school diploma

NCLD has partnered with national organizations to commission reports, review valid research, document findings, promote best practices, and survey parents and teachers. Our findings, along with others such as the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and other reports funded by the U.S. Department of Education do show that NCLB has had a positive impact on not only the academic performance and outcomes for many students with disabilities, but it has forced schools and districts to:

- raise expectations for students with disabilities which are the single most common and important component of achieving change. To end the practice of making excuses and blaming the kids for their achievement and to look at these students as general education students first.

- promote sustainable collaboration between general and special education teachers which can range from requiring dual certification for all personnel to pairing general education and special education teachers in classrooms. Collaboration extends to professional development, with teachers forming teams to attend professional development activities.

- support inclusive and school wide practices as the cornerstone of their improvement plan(s) so that the general education curriculum is used in instruction and the general and state assessment are the reference point for all student teaching and learning.

- use data from a multi-tier system of supports or response to intervention program to make instructional decisions so that teachers can use formative and summative data to design and target instruction and interventions. Many states and districts are developing a school-wide framework or multi-tier system of supports (response to intervention/RTI) so early help can be provided to all students, including those eligible for IDEA before their learning gaps become significant and impeded their learning. This has contributed to reducing the overall identification of students for special education; in fact, the LD identification rate is down by 14% over the past ten years.

- Assess students with disabilities on the general assessments with accommodations as appropriate, end out-of-level testing and give alternate assessments to only a very small number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

- share data with parents and the community as they are the ultimate judge of whether the school is providing the skills their children will need as adults. Parents can be active partners in their child's education when there is interactive communication about student learning.

We know the law needs significant change and parents hope you will build on the most valuable aspects of the law and rely on both research and practice to create even stronger educational opportunities for all students. Such improvements should:

- Maintain a focus on student subgroup performance—transparency and access to the data, while wonderful for parents and families, is not enough. We need to know that our child's performance counts just as all other students in the school.

- Include all schools in an accountability system which includes uniform calculation, reporting and targets for graduation from high school. Simply having Federal consequences for the bottom 5 to 15% of schools will eliminate accountability for the vast majority of students with disabilities.

- Identify struggling learners early and provide targeted instruction and/or interventions (e.g. MTSS/RTI, PBIS).

- Allow use of growth models that must include students with disabilities and ensure that the growth targets both help catch up students and keep them on track to graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

- Promote Universal Design for Learning and use of technology to improve access to general curricula and assessments. Too many students with disabilities struggle unnecessarily with poorly designed pencil-and-paper assessments that test their disability rather than their ability.

- Support teacher training that ensures general and special education teachers have the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching grade-level content and diverse learners.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Kildee and members of the committee—yours is a difficult job. The federal role in education is complicated; however, for parents, the answer is quite simple. If our tax dollars are to be spent on improving educational opportunity and providing educational benefit to the struggling students in this country then please make sure any district and school using that money has sufficient guidelines and requirements to ensure that ALL students count in the same way and are held to the same high expectations.

The parents I work with professionally have children diagnosed with all types of disabilities and we all share one common goal—our children should matter as much as any other in the school building. But most importantly, our children want to learn and play and have the same goals as their friends. Ethan asked me last week: how much education do I need to be a writer—a bachelor's degree, a master's degree? Before I could answer, he answered himself by stating—I think more education is better, don't you? It's my wish that we really could embrace the goal of every child being college and career ready and focus our educational resources and efforts on this important endeavor together. Thank you again for this time.

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Chairman HUNTER. Mr. Jackson, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF BILL JACKSON, FOUNDER AND CEO,  
GREATSCHOOLS**

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you, Chairman Hunter, Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Kildee, and members of the committee. My name—well, I want to thank you for inviting me to speak with you today about parent-driven school accountability and how school performance data can facilitate that.

My name is Bill Jackson, and I am the founder and CEO of GreatSchools. Our mission—we are a nonprofit organization with a mission of improving education by informing parents and engaging and supporting them to play their role in their child's success. And perhaps more importantly I am also the father of two girls, sixth grade and fourth grade.

GreatSchools began publishing an online guide to schools at about the same time that ESEA was reauthorized in 2002. Our guide at [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org) provides a wide range of information about America's 129,000 K-12 schools, everything from official State test data to parent reviews. We know that parents want this information because last year 19 million parents representing approximately 43 percent of American households with K-12 children came to [greatschools.org](http://greatschools.org) to get information about school performance. In addition, almost 1 million Americans have signed up for weekly emails from grade schools that provide insight into their children's school performance.

The parents we serve represent a diverse cross-section of American families, and they tell us that school performance information is invaluable to them. On an individual—on an individual level it helps them choose the right school for their child and their family. Collectively it helps parents hold schools accountable. They use this data to start conversations, sometimes difficult, with teachers, principals and school boards.

From our perspective, the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA provided an invaluable new asset to parents: better data about the

performance of children and schools. With this in mind, we would like to offer three recommendations as you consider next steps.

First, don't back down on performance data transparency. School performance data is like sunshine for parents. The data should continue to be disaggregated. And along with absolute test score data, growth data, as my colleagues have mentioned, can shed important insight into how much schools are helping students grow. It is valuable to parents.

Further, it is critical that school performance data be continued to be—continue to be made available to third parties. Today the evidence suggests that more parents are getting information from third-party sources than from official government databases. We have more opportunity, more freedom to experiment and innovate to make data understandable to parents.

Second, ensure that proficiency means what it says. When a State tells parents that their children are proficient, parents believe it. Unfortunately, today, however, too many States are setting the bar too low. As the Governor of Tennessee and the U.S. Secretary of Education recently remarked on CNN, some States are essentially lying to parents about whether their children are mastering the academic skills they will need to get good jobs and take their place in the world.

This does not mean that all States must have the same standards and assessments. Some States involved with the Common Core and their related assessments are embarking on what we believe is a promising approach to providing parents with an honest assessment of their children's progress towards college. Texas has a different and also promising approach. The K-12 and higher education system got together and they agreed that when students passed—high school students passed the requisite test, they are indeed ready for college in Texas. Ultimately all that matters is that parents have confidence that the proficient label means what it says.

And finally, catalyze innovation to make accountability more personal for American families. Many people, after the passage of ESEA in 2002, I believe, expected that with increased data sunshine, with more parents able to see how schools and their students were doing, in some cases—in many cases—not proficient, that parents would in a sense storm the barricades to demand better schooling for their children. This has not happened.

Now, ultimately, I don't think, we don't think, that the Federal Government can mandate a certain level of school performance. That is up to local governments, State governments and ultimately the people, the parents, who have to have it in their minds and hearts that they want the education system to prepare their children. But I do suggest in the written testimony a variety of approaches where policymakers could lay the groundwork and create the conditions under which that grassroots demand might grow.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about these issues, and I look forward to a discussion.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

[The statement of Mr. Jackson follows:]

### Prepared Statement of Bill Jackson, Founder and CEO, GreatSchools

Good morning Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today about school performance data and how it facilitates parent-driven school accountability.

My name is Bill Jackson. I am the founder and CEO of GreatSchools, a national nonprofit based in San Francisco, CA. Our mission is to improve education by inspiring and guiding parents to support their children's education. I'm also the father of two girls, one in fourth grade, the other in sixth.

GreatSchools began publishing a national online guide to K-12 schools around the same time ESEA was last reauthorized in 2002. Our guide at [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org) provides a wide range of information about America's 129,000 K-12 schools, with everything from official state test data to parent reviews. Today, we are the leading source of information about school quality for parents nationwide, reaching millions of parents with the information they need to make good school choice decisions and to advocate for improvements at their children's schools. We also run programs in Milwaukee, WI and Washington, DC to help low-income parents make informed choices about where to send their children to school.

We know that parents want this information because last year 19 million parents—representing approximately 43 percent of American households with children—came to GreatSchools.org to get information about school performance. In addition, almost 1 million Americans have signed up for weekly emails from GreatSchools.org that provide insight into their children's school and information about how they can be involved in their children's education.

The parents we serve represent a diverse cross-section of American families, and they tell us that school performance information is invaluable to them. On an individual level, this information helps parents find and choose better schools for their children. But it also empowers parents to make their children's schools more accountable. They use this data to start conversations with teachers, principals and school board, giving parents facts that allow them to speak with “the experts” about challenging issues.

From our perspective, the 2002 reauthorization of ESEA provided an invaluable new asset to parents seeking a great education for their children: better data about the academic performance of students and schools. With this in mind, we'd like to offer three recommendations as you consider next steps.

#### *First: Don't back down on performance data transparency*

School performance data is like sunshine for parents. Parents need data to make good decisions about their children's education. The data should continue to be disaggregated so that families can see how different groups of students are performing in schools and districts.

Along with “absolute” test score data, “growth” data that sheds light on how much schools are improving student academic skills is also valuable to parents. To the maximum extent possible, parents should be provided with data that shows whether or not their own children are making progress.

Further, it is critical that school performance data continue to be made available to third parties, like GreatSchools, so that we can present it to parents in accessible ways. Today, the evidence suggests that more parents are getting school information from third-party sources than from official government databases. As third parties get access to better data—such as information about student academic growth—we will be able to continue to innovate and provide even more value to parents.

#### *Second: Ensure that “proficiency” means what it says it means*

When a state tells parents that their children are “proficient,” parents believe their children are on track academically. When they believe this, they are less likely to ask tough questions, move their children to another school, or band together with other parents to advocate for improvements.

Unfortunately, today many states are setting the bar too low. As the governor of Tennessee and the US secretary of education acknowledged in a CNN interview earlier this year, many states are essentially “lying” to parents about whether their children are mastering the academic skills they will need to get good jobs and to take their place in the world.

We believe that American parents deserve an honest assessment of how their children are doing.

This does not mean that all states must have the same standards and assessments—but that parents have reasonable confidence that these standards and assessments mean what they say they do. Indeed, there are different ways of accomplishing this. Some states are involved with the Common Core Standards and related assessments. This effort is a promising approach to providing parents with an

honest assessment of their children's progress toward college- and career-ready graduation.

Texas has a different and also promising approach: the K-12 and higher education systems have agreed on standards and assessments for K-12 students. The state higher education system is certifying that when high school students pass the requisite exams, they are indeed ready for college.

Ultimately, all that matters is that parents have confidence that the "proficient" label really means that their children are on track to compete in a world where education is the key to opportunity.

*Third: Catalyze innovation to make accountability more personal for American families*

When it comes to the performance of the K-12 education system, nobody has more at stake than America's children. Imagine the impact if large numbers of American parents were to demand that local school boards improve school performance and put many more children on track for college and career success. American schools would improve far more quickly.

This kind of commitment to children's futures must arise from the hearts and minds of American parents. But federal, state, and local policymakers can create conditions to make this kind of activism more likely.

Parents are first and foremost motivated to ensure that their own children get a great education. The best way to stimulate an army of advocates for better schools is to help parents see that their own children's futures depend on better schooling than they are getting today.

Policymakers might accelerate this process by catalyzing innovation that helps parents understand how their children are performing and that gives parents more tools to put their children on the path to success. To the extent that policymakers are investing in R&D, here are three specific ideas for consideration:

- New high-quality computer-based assessments that quickly and frequently provide parents with easy-to-understand feedback on their child's progress could help draw parents into deeper understanding of their children's trajectory toward college- and career-readiness. With deeper insight into their children's performance, parents might be more likely to intervene early when they see that their children are not on track.

- New "electronic education records," similar to electronic health records, could put more power in parents' hands by allowing them to share information about their children's achievement and progress with schools, after-school programs, summer programs, and online providers of educational services. Of course, parents would need control over who has access to this information.

- More transparency around assessments could help parents, students, and third-party education providers better align their efforts to help students succeed. Eric Hanushek, GreatSchools board member and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, recently proposed an idea in this vein: "open tests" that allow parents and students, as well as teachers, to better understand what "proficiency" really means.

Ideas like these can be accelerated through grant programs run or funded by the federal government, such as Digital Promise.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues with you today. I am happy to answer any questions.

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Chairman HUNTER. And thank you all for your testimony again, and thanks for being here.

Mr. Jackson, in your testimony you discuss providing parents with greater access to school records and helping make—helping parents make more informed decisions about their students' education. So the question is this: Can you talk about the idea in more detail and how you expect that to happen while maintaining student privacy?

Mr. JACKSON. Yes. The accountability, I think, becomes personal to parents, primarily at the level of—first and foremost at the level of their own children. So while it is useful to release school results and important to disaggregate, et cetera, those results, when parents see that their own child—it may be whether they be—I also have a child with learning disabilities. She was in second grade

when the teacher raised a red flag and said, we have a problem here.

When a parent has access to honest and reliable data about the progress of their child, it gets—it is personal. So while we think that it is critical that States and the Federal Government encourage this, that States and localities provide that information at the level of the child so that parents can grab a hold of the issue that way, privacy issues are paramount, and parents must give permission, obviously, when any data is to be shared with a third party or that data is to be made public in any way that could compromise the privacy and confidentiality of their children's performance.

Chairman HUNTER. The next question is for Dr. Greene. You talked about the benefits of the decentralized system, and our education system was strong as it kept growing from the local level. I would think that some folks, and know that some folks, do disagree with that, and that the Federal Government is needed to set requirements for schools. Can you explain the difference between what you were saying about concern for national standards and requirements such as disaggregated data? And speak as loudly as you possibly can.

Mr. GREENE. Sure. I am not arguing that there is no appropriate Federal role here. And one of the appropriate Federal roles is information provision, sort of a consumer protection. If we want to facilitate choice and competition among local districts, local schools, then that market is made better if there is information available for consumers, and one of the roles the Federal Government can play is in providing information. In fact, the Office of Education was created here in the national government shortly after the Civil War, and its sole function was information collection and provision, and that was a longstanding Federal role.

In the 1960s, we expanded the Federal role to include some redistributed functions. So there are certain kids that are more expensive to educate, kids with disabilities, students who are English language learners. And we recognized that localities had a hard time educating those students because they are more expensive, and so there is a disincentive to serve those students. Well, the Federal Government stepped in and said, we will require you to serve those kids, and we will help you pay for them. These are, I think, appropriate roles.

We have gone beyond that now, and now what we are doing is having the Federal Government engage in developmental aspects of education policy and basically dictating practices and procedures and policies that localities should follow. And frankly, the national government is not very good at figuring that out. The localities are much better at figuring that out in the competitive environment.

Chairman HUNTER. And your point, too, about if we make a mistake with the institution of national standards, that mistake is going to be there for a long time. Can you expound on that a little bit?

Mr. GREENE. Sure. There is actually a great example of this: Japan. Japan has a school calendar that begins in April, not September. Most of the rest of the developed countries in the Northern Hemisphere have schools that begin in September. And this is actually very convenient for people who need to move from place to



place, so they want to be able to pull their kid out in one grade and enroll them in the next grade, and the summer is a great time for moving. People move then.

Well, Japan somehow decided centrally at the national level that they would have—that they would start schools in April, and the trouble is they are kind of stuck with this. And it is incredibly inconvenient for Japanese executives who have to be sent overseas with their families. Their kids have to repeat grades. So you can make a national mistake and be stuck with it for a century, and it can be very disruptive for kids. And that was just kind of a good example of how a country can make that mistake.

We ended up with our school calendar like it is through a decentralized system of choice and competition. This is the work of William Fischel that I would suggest.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Doctor.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member Mr. Kildee.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I direct my question to Ms. Kaloi. As a parent you discuss some of the interaction with your school system. How do you think that you as a parent, or anyone as a parent, would be able to initiate or enhance the confidence of improvement in your school system? What experience have you had in that area?

Ms. KALOI. Thank you for the question.

I think it is very important to think about the role that parents do play in their local school and that we want our local schools to be good schools and to be better schools. It is really about the safe instructional environment in which our children can learn and grow. Parents have the capacity—some better than others, such as myself in a suburban area—we have the capacity to work very closely with our school. Other parents are more challenged to do that. That is why there is an opportunity to think about the appropriate role of the Federal dollar in providing the additional educational benefit to the students who need it and helping parents know that they at least have a floor to stand on when they go in to have those discussions. That floor is very important. Local leaders can decide to expand and have the ceiling as high as they want it, but there are parents who need that support.

Mr. KILDEE. What role should the Federal Government play in getting parents more involved in accomplishing this?

Ms. KALOI. I think we have discussed today on the panel how important this data—access to your student-level data is and being able to understand how is my child doing on grade level, and then be able to have that discussion. For parents with disabilities, we may have been able to have a discussion about how to try and increase supports and services for the child. But until No Child Left Behind, we weren't able to understand how our children were doing as compared to the other students.

Having access to this data is really important. What does my child need to know in this grade to be able to move forward, and be proficient, and learn and grow in the ways that the other children around them are learning and growing? And so I think, again, having that opportunity to have access to the data and understand that the schools are required at some level to do something if certain students need extra help. That is the goal of that Federal role

is if you are providing the additional dollars, what is going to happen to help improve that instruction.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you very much.

Dr. Greene, in Flint, Michigan, where I taught school, we had many people from Paragould going to school there. I was teaching during the Little Rock Nine affair down in your State, and there the Federal Government had to intervene because one group was so unprotected, they were not even allowed to enter the building.

Should the Federal Government protect quality education for subgroups of students? Segregation is not always a physical thing, but can be in the level of education service. So there is a concern of the Federal Government to not only abolish physical segregation, but to make sure that certain people, certain groups are not deprived of the best quality education as possible. Could you respond to that?

Mr. GREENE. Sure. I agree that that redistributive role of the Federal Government is appropriate. It can only be provided by the Federal Government. But the Federal Government has to be humble about what it is good at and what it is not good at. So it can ensure access, but it can't ensure that every student will receive the same education in the same way and receive the same outcome as a result. That is actually beyond—as much as we might like it, and as much as we might deplore the inequalities that might still exist, not all problems can be fixed by the Federal Government, and some of those have to be fixed by struggles at the local level which need to be carried on as well.

Mr. KILDEE. But access can also be denied through quality. It is not just physical access. So if, for example, for one reason or another a school or school system neglects a certain group, that is really denying them access to a quality education; is it not?

Mr. GREENE. Well, access to the school building itself is obviously the most dramatic thing. But there is no measure that currently exists or that is being proposed or that I could envision whereby the Federal Government should ensure equal outcomes for all students from all groups. As much as we might like it, that is impossible.

Mr. KILDEE. Well, we might not achieve—well, my time is up, and I will come back. Thank you, Dr. Greene.

Chairman HUNTER. I thank the ranking member.

The chairman of the full committee Mr. Kline is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the witnesses for being with us today and for your testimony.

A constant theme in our hearings has come back to the importance of this data, this information. And I think there is a growing bipartisan agreement on this committee and increasingly around the country that that data needs to be disaggregated, we need to be able to look in and see how different elements of our student body are doing well. Obviously we have had terrific testimony today about learning disabilities in special needs children, but we need to look in and see how English language learners and the poorer kids and minority kids are doing. That is a product of No Child Left Behind that seems to be pretty widely accepted.

And so we are looking and debating and doing some struggling here in this committee to address the issue of accountability. One of the themes that stays there is the necessity for this information. We don't always agree on the next step, but that is an important part, I think, of our understanding. We need to do something, and that needs to be part of it. So I want to thank you for your—all of your testimony today in that regard, and you are just reinforcing it.

Now, Dr. Greene, I was interested in your testimony about how countries with centralized systems are sometimes outperforming us and sometimes not. We often hear about the outperforming. I mean, Finland gets thrown in a lot of times. We have heard some reports coming out of China, and alarm bells go off because we want to be competing in a world economy, and so we need to have a world-class education, and all these alarms go off. And you are saying, well, sometimes it sort of matters and doesn't.

So should we just ignore those comparisons, or is there something there that we can pull out of that when we see—we get these comparison reports that says somebody else is doing a whole lot better than we are?

Mr. GREENE. Well, I think what these comparisons show is that a lot of factors help explain the academic success in countries, not just the extent of centralized or decentralized standards, curriculum and assessments, but also it is important to have a system that is appropriate for your country. So Finland is a small, homogenous country of a couple million people, so is Singapore, and perhaps they can have a centralized system and have that work reasonably well because they are so small and homogenous.

We are large and diverse, and we have to recognize that fact, and we have to have a system that is appropriate for us. And we did. We built a system like that. It is called federalism. And actually it worked really well and built a world-class education system. I mean, we have to remember there was a long time when everyone was chasing after us, and they were chasing after us with our decentralized system. So there is no reason why we have to throw away what helped us build a world-class education system. Perhaps we need to return to our roots rather than to chase after someone else's model that may be inappropriate for us.

Mr. KLINE. Well, let us explore that for just a minute because we are not—by these comparisons we are talking about, we are not the destination of choice for a number of places because test scores internationally show that some countries are doing better. And you postulated that at one time we were the destination, we were the model. So what changed? Why aren't we now?

Mr. GREENE. Well, I think a lot of things changed. I mean, there are obviously things in our culture, our popular culture, our families, that are very important for the trajectory of our educational achievement. But another thing that we did politically is that we significantly centralized the education system. Now a majority of district funding is coming from State or Federal sources on average, not from local taxes, and increasing sets of regulations are being dictated by the State and national governments. We also consolidated districts quite significantly so that there is a lot less competition among them.

I mean, there is actually interesting research, some that I have done, some that Caroline Hoxby has done out at Stanford, that shows that actually in States that have more districts where there is a more competitive environment among localized providers, you have much better student outcomes. And so when we centralize, we are reducing the competition, and when we regulate, we are reducing the competition among those local providers, and that has been hurting our achievement.

Mr. KLINE. Thank you very much.

I am just about to run out of time, so I am not going to ask this question, but I am very interested, Mr. Jackson, in the parental information. I think that is an important part of the progress that we are seeing around the country as real innovators are stepping up to make changes, because you have parents—you have got a more formal system in California, the parental trigger, but parents are getting involved as they increasingly understand that the status quo is failing their kid.

So I will yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to recognize Ms. Hirono for 5 minutes.

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We have had so many hearings on the importance of quality early education, and all of them—I would say almost 100 percent of the people who have been testifying in this committee over the years have acknowledged that there is much evidence to support quality early education.

I wanted to ask Ms. Kaloi, with your experience in dealing with children with learning disabilities, how important is quality early education for this group of learners?

Ms. KALOI. It is significantly important, and thank you for that question. You know the data better than I and the work you have done in your State in Hawaii. Children who are at risk for being diagnosed with disabilities or having some kind of disadvantage, to be able to provide that early start, that early help is premier.

We know from data that has been substantiated for the last 20 years that students who are not reading by third grade are at much reduced ability to graduate from high school, and that alone is one marker that we need to continue to pay attention to. Reading matters, and it affects opportunities later in life. So that is one example.

We have several opportunities to work in the early education arena related to screening, the use of formative assessment, the use of response to intervention to give students early help, and it all makes an incredible difference. Schools have been so willing in this new environment of paying attention to who needs help sooner that we have seen an increase in the use of response to intervention, or what we call a multitier system of support—a framework where you actually help kids as soon as they begin to struggle, and you don't wait.

Ms. HIRONO. So that being the case then, what percentage of the children with learning disabilities have access or are in quality early education programs throughout the country? Do you have any idea?

Ms. KALOI. With learning disabilities, it is a little bit tricky in that we don't tend to diagnose learning disabilities because of the way the Federal law requires that you diagnose a learning disability or allows for it to be diagnosed. So we really look at kids who have early speech delay and early problems that then lead to and can lead to the evaluation and diagnosis of a learning disability.

Head Start has 10 percent of its funding to focus on students who are at risk, and they are doing a very good job of trying to target those dollars and look at kids who are in Head Start programs. Some States have taken great strides to begin to look at this in a very intense and direct way to know what those early warning signs are.

Ms. HIRONO. Since we really don't have a good system for identifying children with learning disabilities early on, then, obviously, by the time they are identified, they are beyond 4 years old. So what percentage of those kids who are later identified have had the quality early learning experience?

Ms. KALOI. I can get back to you and answer that on the record, if that is okay. I don't have that number right in front of me. But we do know there are still far too many students who we wait to identify them later in the third and the fourth grade. We know that that is one of the ongoing dilemmas that we have. One of the challenges that learning disabilities presents is that we are waiting too long to give them that early help.

Ms. HIRONO. I get from your testimony that having a learning disability, that is not a permanent condition for the vast majority of the kids who are deemed as learning disabled, that they move out of that, into the classroom and they—when we think of children with learning disabilities, we may think of the most extreme learning disabled children, but your testimony says the vast majority of children are not in that category, that they can move out of this subgroup?

Ms. KALOI. That is correct. If you look at the chart that is in my full testimony, it shows you there are 13 ways to classify students with disabilities in our public schools. Specific learning disabilities are one category of those 13, and a learning disability is a language-based disability that primarily affects one's ability to process information. So it is lifelong, however, but you can compensate and overcome and be very successful in life with a learning disability.

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you.

I am running out of time. I did have one short questions for Mr. Jackson.

You noted in your testimony that the national core standards help. Because if you are providing national information to parents, it would help if they were comparing apples with apples, right, and not apples and oranges? So that is great for the parents that access your Website. But there are millions of parents who don't have access, who may not know, even if they have the information, what to do with it, how to be an advocate for their children.

So last week we had testimony on an idea of having parent academies so that parents are empowered to navigate the system for their children. They may even increase their own ability to—for many of the parents who may be economically disadvantaged, et

cetera. So is that something that you all would support, parent academies to really empower parents to use the information that you are providing?

Chairman HUNTER. The gentlelady's time has expired. If you wouldn't mind taking that for the record.

Ms. HIRONO. He is nodding yes.

Mr. JACKSON. I would be happy to answer later.

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you.

I would like to recognize Mrs. Biggert for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think that Dr. Gooden has likened the current high-stakes test of accountability to an educational autopsy.

Mr. GOODEN. I did.

Mrs. BIGGERT. And I do think that we all think that the data collection and reporting can be a burden to States and school districts, but I think we all know that it is very important to monitor student achievement. And as we move forward with reauthorization efforts, how do we make sure that the data is used to improve instruction, not just as reports that arrive well after the school year is over and in many cases way into the next year before any of that—

Mr. GOODEN. That is my very point, that using one test given once a year is a little more than an autopsy. Because by the time the results are received, the students have moved on; and it actually does very little to shape instruction for a school, for a classroom, or for an individual student.

Now, what we need are multiple assessments; and by using a variety of assessments, some of them formative, the teachers can monitor, adjust their instruction. They can use it to address specific student needs. We have seen great results from using interim assessment models during the year as students are still under our tutelage.

Mrs. BIGGERT. We have talked about the growth model which would really change the usage, too, of the data, wouldn't it, the student performance? So how do we help to develop systems that the teachers can get the data in timely and—

Mr. GOODEN. First, you must have a good electronic data system that allows for tracking so that when information are gathered, that they are accessible, that they can be adequately sorted, and that teachers can have access, and they can know a specific student's performance deficits and needs and can modify their instruction to address those.

Growth is an important thing. As I indicated, students come to the starting line at different levels; and it goes back to the previous question about early childhood experiences. We have some youngsters who come to our schools who are, frankly, not at what we might say the kindergarten level. And while we have done a great deal to enhance pre-K opportunities in our school district, the fact is that we still have students who don't have a viable pre-K experience. And it is very important for us to acknowledge that when they start at different places we are going to have to do some dramatic things if we want them to all end at the finish line at the proper time. And it is not going to be a good result when students

are not up at the starting line and think that they are going to win the race. So we have to do some things along the way.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Thank you.

Then my other question is for whoever wants to answer. But research has confirmed that parental involvement—we have been talking about this—is important to student success. When I was in the State legislature—and that was like 16 years before I came here, maybe—yeah, about 16—in Illinois, we turned the Chicago public schools over to Mayor Daley, who was the mayor at that time, to take over the schools and revamp them.

One of the things that the first superintendent then that came in, Paul Vallas, wanted to really encourage the parental involvement. So he set up councils of parents for each of the schools, and there was to be an election. The problem was nobody showed up and weren't involved. So what he did was to not—no student got their report card unless their parents came to the school to pick them up, and that kind of started how getting the parents interested.

You know, I think that the accountability can really empower parents, but how do we get the parents there that should be there to take part of that?

Mr. GOODEN. I will be glad to talk about that.

I think parent involvement is absolutely critical. We have a system of neighborhood elementary schools, and you just cannot overstate the importance of a viable parent organization. We have a PTA unit at every school. We have a district PTA council that works with those individual units to build their leadership and engagement capacity. And we do a great deal of things to try to get those parents engaged all along the way. Just giving them information is important. But they need to be engaged in their children's education with formal and informal intermittent conferences.

Mrs. BIGGERT. Thank you. My time has expired.

Mrs. ROBY [presiding]. Ms. Woolsey is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you.

Dr. Greene, you said earlier that there is no measure to ensure equal outcomes for all students. You have to know I disagree with that. We do have data. We do have assessments to identify where students are falling behind, and then we can target the interventions. That is in fact one way that we can ensure equal access to a high-quality education.

So I would be interested to know what time period you are discussing when you talk about our system being the envy of the world before Federal involvement. I truly believe that the Little Rock Nine might very much disagree with you, and I think that minority students and students with disabilities would disagree in general. It was Federal involvement that turned this around. So I don't need you to defend this, but I think that is very wrongheaded.

Mr. GREENE. Sure. Well, certainly there were many blemishes in the history of U.S. public schooling, but this is true worldwide.

Ms. WOOLSEY. We are talking about the United States.

Mr. GREENE. No, no, no. So the question I think was, is it the envy of the world?

Ms. WOOLSEY. When was it the envy of the world before we had these Federal interventions?

Mr. GREENE. Well, like I said, some of the Federal interventions are desirable and productive. That is when it comes to redistributive matters, that is ensuring that everyone has access to the public schooling system and information provision. I think those are very appropriate roles for the Federal Government, and that expansion of the Federal role was desirable.

However, the Federal Government is not good at figuring out the specific standards, curriculum, and assessments that schools should be employing; and it is an evolving process. So, you know, keep in mind local schools try lots of things, and some of those things work, and some of them don't.

Ms. WOOLSEY. That is right. So who is—okay. I hear what you are saying, and I know where you are going.

And I do have another question with a whole different thought; and it is for you, Ms. Kaloi.

I think I need to tell my story. I married—my children—my three children and I became a blended family with a young kindergartner and his dad. And this young kindergartner actually had very clear speech problems and thought process problems, a very high IQ but just couldn't quite put that all together.

So we had him tested. This is in the 1970s. I mean, this kid is 47 now. He is a college graduate, by the way, and a very successful dad and the whole thing. But we did it. We had him tested. We got him in the special education class with the program that met his specific needs. This is way before IDEA.

And it was very clear that is what it took. It took that kind of parental involvement. And they told us then—I believe he was in third grade—if your son has self-respect and confidence as he is learning around his disability, he will be fine in his later years. So that is what we knew that we needed to be working on, and it was a relief to the entire family to know how to help him. Because he is a great, great person and a great—he was a great kid.

So we know that parents who are involved can make a huge difference. So what can we do for the child whose parents either can't be involved because of lack of education themselves or can't help this child succeed and provide the support because they don't have the resources at home? Some don't have the will to do it. Are there services that we should be providing to these school systems, wrap-around services? What kind—how do we get them there?

Ms. KALOI. Thank you for the question. Thank you for sharing your story.

The most important thing I think you said is you knew this. I wish more Members of Congress knew what you just said, that people with learning disabilities can achieve, they can learn with their peers, they can graduate from high school, and they can have great success in life. But it does take additional educational support, it takes intervention, it takes early help, and it takes consistent support. That is the most important thing, if we could help spread that message together instead of perpetuating the myth they are the downfall of what is happening in the schools.

Secondly, it is a partnership. There is a role for the Federal Government in providing this floor. Parents need to know that their child's outcomes matter the same as every other child in the building.



Jay just said to me, if your kid is exempt, then your kid is ignored. I like that you just said that. I like that he believes that.

It is very important to know that we can't exempt any children. They all need to count because they need not be ignored.

And the third thing is there are organizations like mine and others who are trying to provide that information. We need stronger partnerships with pushing this information out and providing support in very high need areas, and many of us are working very hard to do that. But there is a role here for all of us to play together to partner in those efforts.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to recognize Mrs. Roby for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here today.

And I have to say as all of us travel around our districts and meet with superintendents and with educators and we oftentimes bring that testimony to you as the basis for our questions, but I have to tell you this morning I am excited because, Mr. Jackson, what you have been talking about is something that happened just in my life this morning as a mom of a 6-year-old in the first grade of Montgomery County School System in Montgomery, Alabama.

My husband went to the first grade powwow last week to meet with the teachers to make sure that we understood, you know, Margaret's progression and where she was and what we as parents need to be doing at home to reinforce what was being taught in the classroom and had the opportunity to sign up to receive access to Margaret's grades on line. And so we received a password—a log-in name and a password.

And she had a math test this Monday; and, of course, it didn't come home because the teachers can't grade the papers that quickly and turn them around. But before it came home this morning, we checked on line and found out what her grade on that test was and then what her average was for the year in math.

Now, she is in the first grade, but she is learning skills that if, of course, we get behind and we don't build upon, then she can get further behind. And as a parent to know that we had immediate access to this information where, if she was falling behind, we could then contact the teacher, set up a conference if we needed to, and work with Margaret specifically on that skill so as she builds this week on the next skill, she wouldn't fall behind.

And I just am thrilled at your testimony because I think there is a—we can distinguish between that type of accountability and the accountability of the institution and the Federal Government's role as you, Dr. Greene, have talked about on the national level that this type of accountability is specific to that school, to that classroom, to that child, when we know that every student population from city to city, State to State, school district to school district, and even schools within those school districts vary based on student population and what the needs are of those children.

So I know that is not really a question, but I just was thrilled to hear your testimony. And if you want to expand on that, maybe some of the specific benefits of great schools that you have seen that can add to that.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you for the question, and I am glad that Margaret is on track.

Mrs. ROBY. I am proud to report that she is this week, but we will stay on top of it.

Mr. JACKSON. With a Member of Congress for a mother, I think it is probably an extra challenge with the demands of the job.

One thought is that technology as you have described is an incredibly powerful tool in this effort. And also to address a question asked by a member earlier as well, that technology is increasingly accessible and used by lower income, more disadvantaged families. The percentage of families whose parents regularly use a cell phone to communicate is really quite high and in some low-income communities very high.

And if you as a school were to innovate, building on Dr. Greene's point about, okay, let us innovate at the local level—let us say we had a very high population, for example, of immigrants who don't have on-line access but do have a cell phone, we could work with—there are already both non-profit and for-profit providers of services looking at, okay, how do we use that cell phone and not require that the parent would have that Internet-connected computer to go on line and log in. And we could even use text messaging to say your child was or wasn't at school, and so text messaging is increasingly—not universal, but keeps inching up there.

So my only additional thought would be, well, first, is congratulations on being a successful, involved parent and then, secondly, that local innovation, anything that Federal or other policymakers can do to support and encourage that local innovation to use technology to reach, empower, inform parents is very powerful.

Mrs. ROBY. Thank you for that. I have to say it is exciting to see that there are innovative school districts that are taking advantage of these things in order to allow the parent greater access. I think that is something that we have talked about today, is just having that access to hold the teacher and the school accountable for what they are doing.

And then, Dr. Greene, just going back to you—and my time is almost out. But talking about the superintendents and our educators, they are hungry for parent involvement. I guess any of you could answer that, and we kind of touched on this. But what are some ways we can incentivize—and you can submit this for the record, because my time is out. But what are some ways specifically that we can incentivize our parents to get involved in our children's education?

So thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to recognize Mrs. Davis from the beautiful city of San Diego for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, from San Diego.

Maybe I will just ask you—thank you all very much for being here, and I am sorry I missed your earlier remarks. I hope I can pick this up.

The opportunities for parents to attend parent academies was mentioned earlier, and I know actually in San Diego that was started many years ago. I think there are some—I wouldn't even call it controversy, but I think initially there was a hope that the achievement levels of children whose parents were involved would

maybe show more incremental success than they did. I think that has changed some. Partly, it is a little bit more sophistication perhaps of the academies, and we had a witness testify to that earlier.

But I wonder if you could comment on that and to what extent that should be really part and parcel of our schools and maybe the decisions about what kind of approaches are used, are different. But the fact that there is a way that parents can really get more information about how they can help their kids be successful is important.

The other question I would ask you to go along with is where would that play into a Federal role that is trying to set some parameters in a kind of collaborative evaluation of individual schools as well as districts and, of course, at the State level. Do you see that there is a Federal role in that and how does that have anything to do with whether or not you really provide more opportunities for parents to learn in a setting that is very welcoming I think for parents to understand how best to do this?

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you for the question.

Your point that there is limited evidence of the efficacy of programs that target parents is well taken. The evidence that does exist, stronger evidence, is for programs that address parents of the youngest children. There is a program called the Nurse-Family Partnership. There is a program run by a nonprofit called Avance. These programs have shown, using randomized control trial methodology, that the students of the parents served do better in school.

They begin in the case of the Nurse-Family Partnership when—before children are born, and they help—I think there is an important point to be made here, which is parents need information. They also need to develop skills. So you can know—you can know how your child is doing, but if you develop certain ways of talking to your child and motivate them that help them develop their own confidence and capacity, that is the ultimate goal.

So I think the last comment—

Mrs. DAVIS. I would agree with you. I think some of those programs are excellent. Unfortunately, there are a number of communities in which they are quite controversial.

Mr. JACKSON. Yes. Well, I would say it is up to the private sector, non-profits primarily in this case, given this market, to burst through some more barriers there.

Can we use a combined technology and on-the-ground approach? I think that is very promising in looking at the parent academy concept. A number of districts have done that.

Can we marry communications technology with some old-fashioned, on-the-ground organizing and education, especially starting when children are very young and could we show results? I think that we could in the future.

Mrs. DAVIS. Yes, Dr. Greene, did you want to comment?

Mr. GREENE. I could just—I don't know—to answer that question, also, though, part of why parents are not more involved is because they don't have a sense of ownership over their schools. That is that they may not see the schools as their school and they may not see that because the school is increasingly controlled by more distant authorities. And so one of the ways to increase parental in-

volvement is to decentralize so that people feel like it is their school.

And just also to help answer Representative Woolsey's earlier question that one of the kind of golden era when people were imitating the U.S. is when we had incredibly high secondary graduation—secondary school attendance and graduation higher than anywhere in the world, and people wanted to imitate offering secondary schools. Where did secondary schools come from? How did we get high schools?

Mrs. DAVIS. Can I go ahead—

Mr. GREENE. Sure. I am sorry.

Mrs. DAVIS. I am sorry. I appreciate your wanting to do that, but I don't have very much more time, either.

Just when we talk about access to data on student achievement and, obviously, there is some States that have had school accountability report cards and other ways of just generally getting that information out. In addition, obviously, every school has an individual report card for a child. I think that is really just an outline of sorts, doesn't give them as much information perhaps as they want.

But I am just—again, kind of going back to what the Federal role is in that, how should the Federal Government play a role in those systems?

Ms. KALOI. Just quickly, I think you touched on what kind of collaboration is effective, and I think one of the findings that is really compelling is that there is better collaboration now between general and special education teachers. Having the Federal Government continue to fund and promote professional development for teachers is critical. Parents want to know their child is in a class with a qualified teacher, with an effective teacher.

And then to this point related to helping the parents become more engaged, I think we have challenges that are due to cultural backgrounds, to—I know families—for instance, Hispanic families may tend to have a feeling that the school knows best, and asking questions is difficult and challenging. Other cultures have similar issues.

We know in the research that we have done related to how parents have discussions related to their students with disabilities, what are the proper ways to help them feel like they have the tools to ask the questions? So I think it is about giving incentives to make sure that there is training for parents that can be provided. But, again, it is all about instruction in the classroom and then having parents be able to know that they can go in and ask those questions without, you know, any kind of fear attached to it.

Mrs. DAVIS. My time is up. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. In closing, I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to testify before the subcommittee today. I think everybody found your testimony extremely intriguing and spot on, I think, on both sides of the aisle.

I would like to yield to Mr. Kildee for any closing remarks he may have.

Mr. KILDEE. First of all, I would like to thank you for assembling a very good panel. We learned some things about education. We have learned—it is nice to see people who have some differences of

viewpoints and some overlapping viewpoints. And you and I have always exercised civility. It was nice to see a panel out there that can give us some good examples of civility, and I really appreciate the content and the manner in which you delivered your testimony. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to thank the ranking member.

And as one of the other people up here that has—I have got a fifth grader, a second grader, and a kindergartner. It was great hearing the word “parent” uttered from your mouths over and over and over again.

We use Face Time with my son. He gives me his math homework. I was a math nerd in college. We use any technology we are able to use. Forget about the school. I take it upon myself to get the information for my kids and help them even while I am out here. So we use Face Time, and I help them with their math homework.

But we would just like to thank you all again. Thank you for your great testimony.

And, with that, there being no further business, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[An additional submission of Mr. Hunter follows:]



*Real Learning for Real Life®*

September 28, 2011

The Honorable Duncan Hunter  
 Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood,  
 Elementary and Secondary Education  
 Rayburn House Office Building  
 Washington, DC 20515

RE: Comments – September 21, 2011 hearing entitled, “Education Reforms: Ensuring the Education System is Accountable to Parents and Communities.”

Dear Chairman Hunter:

As Superintendent and CEO of the School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech), I am forwarding policy recommendations [see attachment] in connection with the September 21, 2011, hearing entitled, “Education Reforms: Ensuring the Education System is Accountable to Parents and Communities.” The recommendations pertain to schools having a supermajority of reengaged dropouts and the need to provide alternative accountability for these schools due to the unique, socio-economic profile of the students they serve.

The School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech®) is a network of fully-accredited charter high schools focused on dropout prevention and recovery in California, Arizona, Arkansas New Mexico and Florida. SIATech operates in partnership with the Department of Labor’s Job Corps and other WIA-funded workforce programs. As a dropout recovery public high school operating in partnership with federal workforce training programs, SIATech, and schools similar to SIATech, face numerous federal and state accountability challenges.

These challenges evolve in part from the overlapping jurisdictional authority, and inconsistent policy and regulatory, environment in which recovery programs function. Academic schools which exclusively serve reconrolled students warrant more appropriate accountability, policy, and practice considerations than currently exist under ESEA. One size ESEA accountability policy does not fit all – for dropout recovery schools in general, and especially not for those in partnership with WIA funded programs having a federally imposed, two year enrollment limitation.

There are estimates that there are up to five million disengaged youth in the United States, many, if not most of whom are high school eligible. This statistic makes the question of appropriate and fair accountability for dropout recovery schools a mainstream concern. To ignore dropout recovery in deference to dropout prevention as a policy focus would be a travesty in terms of both the ongoing social impact, and the economic impact - estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars of lost tax revenue over the collective lifetime of the current dropout population.

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There is an inherent conflict between policies geared to traditional 4-year schools, and the dictates of open entry/open exit schools dedicated to the reengagement of out-of-school youth with wide-ranging credit deficiencies. Despite the unprecedented dropout rate and the demonstrated need to recuperate out-of-school youth, dropout recovery high schools have received little to no focus in the ongoing reauthorization debate.

SIATech is proposing changes to the current accountability measures in connection with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization processes. Our policy recommendations would diminish policy threats to dropout recovery schools' ability to serve students. If implemented, the recommendations would reduce disincentives and impediments to recovery school operation and increase the formation of partnerships to serve out-of-school youth across the country. Implementation of graduation rate requirements that are relevant to recovery schools, waiver or modification of seat time requirements, individual student growth accountability measures and the elimination of disincentives to involvement with recovery are critical.

In summary, it is SIATech's hope that the House Education and Labor Committee will consider options like adding dropouts as a special population, and/or provide incentives for states to develop alternative accountability for dropouts. We also recommend that the Committee conduct a hearing on dropout recovery -- or a roundtable or briefing if one of these latter options would be more feasible.

Your consideration of our recommendations is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Linda Dawson  
Superintendent/CEO

## Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

*SIATech's Policy Recommendations for Dropout Recovery High Schools*



### Summary of Policy Issues

**GOAL:** Establish appropriate accountability for (1) Graduation Rates and (2) Dropout Rates for schools populated by more than 75 percent (or other supermajority percentage of) dropouts.

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** SIATech proposes the use of an "alternative cohort." The alternative cohort would be defined as all students who are enrolled in a dropout recovery high school for 10 or more consecutive months.

**GOAL:** Provide Accountability for Student Learning through a system based on individual student growth measures.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** Evaluate dropout recovery high schools on the basis of learning gains made by its students (rather than the comparative achievement results of cohort grade levels.)

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** Expand the criteria for evaluating the performance of dropout recovery high schools by including multiple performance measures including: student projects, portfolios, hands on demonstrations, soft skills measurement, non-academic constructs such as the growth of hope, well-being, and engagement among students (as measured by the Gallup Student Poll), in addition to state tests, and national normed numeracy and literacy assessments.

**GOAL:** At the local level, reduce policy disincentives to districts in order to encourage more dropout prevention and recovery schools and programs.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** Allow states and districts to disaggregate the graduation and dropout rates of dropout recovery schools from those of the sponsoring districts, and amend current dropout regulations to allow districts to count reengaged dropouts as a dropout only once.

**GOAL:** Eliminate or mitigate miscellaneous policy and administrative impediments to open entry / open exit dropout recovery schools.

**RECOMMENDATION #5:** Provide incentives for (or otherwise encourage states to) waive seat-time requirements for dropout recovery high schools that provide a fully-accredited competency-based program for accelerated credit recovery and learning gains.

**RECOMMENDATION #6:** Increase the frequency of state-required exit exams or create "on-demand" testing opportunities for students. Decrease delays of exit exams' result reporting.

**GOAL:** Illuminate the distinctions between schools which serve predominately dropouts to increase awareness and knowledge about dropout recovery's important role in alleviating the dropout crisis.

**RECOMMENDATION #7:** SIATech strongly recommends that the Committee hold one or more hearings focused on recovery high schools with a super majority percentage of dropouts.



## Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

*SIATech's Policy Recommendations for Dropout Recovery High Schools*



### Introduction

The School for Integrated Academics and Technologies (SIATech®) is a network of fully-accredited charter high schools focused on dropout prevention and recovery. SIATech operates in partnership with the Department of Labor's Job Corps and other WIA-funded workforce programs. As a dropout recovery public high school operating in partnership with federal workforce training programs, SIATech faces numerous federal and state accountability challenges.

In this document, SIATech recommends several policy considerations to encourage more schools to serve recovered dropouts. Dropout recovery high schools provide significant social, economic, and academic benefits to their students and to their communities as a whole. Schools serving re-enrolled dropouts warrant more appropriate accountability measures than currently exist under ESEA. These schools and their students would also benefit from distinctive administrative considerations to better serve re-enrolled dropouts. Action on these policy issues by the committee is strongly recommended.

### Overview of the Problem

Current performance measures do not adequately reflect the success or failure of dropout recovery high schools. Schools that serve a predominately at-risk (at-risk) student population may have a significantly positive impact on the population they are serving, particularly given the baseline achievement levels of these students when they arrive at the school and the non-school-related factors impacting them. Current performance measures are designed for traditional public schools and emphasize achievement rather than individual student learning gains. Schools who serve at-risk populations are labeled as "failing" schools under this system when these schools in fact are succeeding. There is a critical need for an accountability system that will identify success factors for such schools which serve the most disadvantaged students who have previously dropped out of school. These success factors would more accurately measure dropout recovery high schools in a manner that would distinguish successful schools from those that are truly in need of improvement.

Dropout recovery high schools provide significant social, economic, and academic benefits to their students and to their communities as a whole.

- Nearly 1.3 million students did not graduate from American high schools in 2009; the lost lifetime earnings in America for that class of dropouts alone totals nearly \$335 billion.<sup>1</sup>
- Since 1998, nearly 10,000 out of school youth have earned their high school diploma at SIATech's 15 school sites.

## Policy Recommendation #1

SIATech proposes the use of an “alternative cohort.” The alternative cohort would be defined as all students who are enrolled in a dropout recovery high school for 10 or more consecutive months.

Current ESEA regulations stipulate a uniform calculation for determining high school graduation rate using a standard 4-year cohort. Dropout recovery schools and programs must accelerate learning so re-enrolled students can more quickly gain academic skills and knowledge in order to recuperate credits. Dropout recovery schools and programs do not generally group students into traditional grade structures. These structures are the essential framework of the current and proposed graduation rate calculations. Therefore, application of the traditional formulas is not an appropriate way to compare a dropout recovery school with other schools.

The creation of an “alternative cohort” for purposes of accountability for dropout recovery high schools would amend this issue. An “alternative cohort” is defined as all graduates and all students who are enrolled in a dropout recovery high school for 10 or more consecutive months. The formula for calculating graduation and dropout rates considers the number of graduates compared with students who have been in school for more than 10 months. This demonstrates a realistic picture of a dropout recovery high school’s success in retaining students.

Graduation and dropout calculations based on an alternative cohort model will encourage, rather than discourage, the re-enrollment of out-of-school and under-credited students.

## Policy Recommendation #2

Evaluate dropout recovery high schools on the basis of learning gains made by its students (rather than the comparative achievement results of cohort grade levels).

Students who re-enroll in dropout recovery schools often enter with serious credit deficiencies. The students and their teachers face multi-faceted challenges and frequently make multi-faceted accomplishments which may be lost in assessments which utilize one place-in-time achievement test results. Rather, alternative assessment options over time can reveal the learning gains that a student makes which would be more appropriate, particularly for dropout recovery schools and programs.<sup>2,3</sup>

Likewise, as articulated by the American Youth Policy Forum, “Low academic skills make it very difficult to help students catch up once they have fallen behind or off track. Schools working with students who begin with serious academic deficits need to be able to document the growth of students who make significant academic gains, even if they remain below grade level. Recognizing that students begin high school with varying levels of performance and take different lengths of time to master high school subjects, the alternative education world has called for measuring student academic growth, not simply achievement measured at one point in time. Such growth models attempt to show change in student performance over time and allow students to demonstrate their progress and programs to demonstrate their impact. Alternative educators feel very strongly that assessments measuring growth are the most appropriate for the population they serve.”<sup>4</sup>

An individual student growth model, such as a Value Added Assessment, that includes the use of nationally normed literacy and numeracy assessments provides a standard measure of performance and may be used to identify the best and worst performing schools. The knowledge gained may also serve as a foundation to guide and improve individual school and teacher performance.

A value-added model shows how each student has achieved an expected learning gain during a short period of time, i.e. 60 day, 120 days, and ten months. These gains would be carefully included to supplement opportunities to further improve teaching and learning.

### Policy Recommendation #3

Expand the criteria for evaluating the performance of dropout recovery high schools by including multiple performance measures.

Beyond the state-required assessments for literacy and numeracy, school performance evaluation should be expanded to include multiple measures. These could include student projects and portfolios as well as soft skills measurement. Particularly in a dropout recovery setting, numerous areas of progress are needed to produce an individual who not only has the academic skills needed for graduation, but the critical thinking and employability skills needed to be college- and career-ready.

Research by Gallup in the psychological constructs of hope, well-being, and engagement has revealed the reliability of these measures to predict college enrollment, retention, and success of students.<sup>5</sup> Evaluations of the performance of school and staff would be well-informed by baseline and growth surveys of its re-enrolled dropouts in hope, well-being, and engagement.

### Policy Recommendation #4

Allow states and districts to disaggregate the graduation and dropout rates of dropout recovery schools from those of the sponsoring districts, and amend current dropout regulations to allow districts to count reengaged dropouts as a dropout only once.

Under the current ESEA accountability system, there are underlying disincentives to dropout recovery and prevention. Due to the high importance of dropout recovery and prevention, policy should alleviate these disincentives for recovery program partnerships.

The graduation and dropout rates of dropout recovery schools should be disaggregated from the overall district rates. Rather, these schools should be grouped with "like populations," such as court schools and community day schools that reflect a more transient population. The data could be reported with county or state calculations, or in some other manner which does not penalize sponsoring school districts. The use of an

alternative cohort will appropriately hold students accountable as dropouts while decreasing the likelihood that schools and sponsoring districts are penalized for students with multiple dropout events.

Secondly, school districts should be limited to counting students as dropouts once.<sup>6,7</sup> When a student drops out of high school, he or she is counted as a dropout. Upon enrollment in a dropout recovery high school, the student becomes a “transfer” for the previous school’s data systems, and the timeline for the re-engagement effort begins. Using the alternative cohort logic, the dropout recovery high school will have a 10-month window in which it will not be penalized if the student drops out again. This recommendation will encourage more districts, counties, and schools to offer additional educational opportunities for out-of-school youth to re-engage in high school.

## Policy Recommendation #5

Provide incentives for (or otherwise encourage states to) waive seat-time requirements for dropout recovery high schools that provide a fully-accredited competency-based program for accelerated credit recovery and learning gains.

Seat-time requirements presents an inherent conflict with the accelerated learning, competency based, instructional program mandates and practice of programs like SIA Tech and other dropout recovery schools. Policy should move beyond seat-time requirements for dropout recovery high schools that provide a fully-accredited competency-based program for accelerated credit recovery and learning gains.<sup>8,9</sup>

A model with competency-based learning pathways is critical for students who have dropped out of school. Competency-based learning moves away from a system that relies on a measure of the length of time a student has studied a subject (seat-time credits), to a system that awards credits based upon the demonstration of skill level mastery. A willingness to break the confinement of grade-level boundaries allows expanded access to curriculum through extended day learning opportunities, work-based learning, and service learning. When a student acquires a defined level of skill or competency, they move on to the next set of standards, regardless of time and without grade level restrictions. While there may be many viable alternative approaches to Carnegie unit reform, there is a need for a more flexible education policy that incorporates accelerated learning such as that found in a competency-based model.

The National Governors Association dropout report calls for this reform, and states: “By cracking the Carnegie Unit, states can address the fundamental mismatch between rigid, lockstep education systems and the demands of the current economy. They can open the door to innovative ways of instructing students and a more flexible and personalized education system that can better engage students, improve student achievement, and ultimately reduce dropout rates.”<sup>10</sup>

## Policy Recommendation #6

Increase the frequency of state-required exit exams or create “on-demand” testing opportunities for students. Decrease delays of exit exams’ result reporting.

Student access to all state mandated assessments, most commonly in the form of exit or graduation exams and end-of-course exams, should not serve as a barrier to student success and progress. The infrequency of high school exit, and other state required exams, can wreak havoc on the operation and success rate of open entry/open exit schools. In order for dropout recovery schools to meet the needs of re-enrolled students, it is ability to access mandated assessments year-round is critical. Infrequent testing opportunities and delayed test result reporting are significant obstacles to keeping previously out-of-school youth motivated and moving toward graduation, higher education, and the workplace.

In line with expanding opportunities for students to take these tests throughout the calendar year, is the need for more timely result reporting to students and schools. Delays in processing test results, sometimes involving months, can also impose economic hardship and lost opportunities on students.

## Policy Recommendation #7

The Committee should hold hearings focused on dropout recovery schools that serve a super majority percentage of dropouts.

There is a need for greater illumination of the distinctions between schools which serve dropouts and other alternative education programs. Due to the numerous policy implications outlined in this document, it is critical to the survival of dropout recovery schools for there to be clarification of these schools' unique and innovative characteristics.

The recent media and research attention to the graduation crisis has focused on dropout prevention. However, dropout recovery is also important. A committee hearing would be an excellent opportunity to shed light on the complexities, innovations, and performances of schools serving re-enrolled dropouts. This would better inform national and local decision-making around dropout recovery high schools. As suggested by the American Youth Policy Forum, "Policymakers at all levels of government should use both the bully pulpit and innovative legislation to achieve solid recognition that dropout recovery is an integral and essential dimension of school reform."<sup>11</sup>

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## For more information

For more information on these policy suggestions, please contact SIATech Superintendent/CEO Dr. Linda Dawson at [linda.dawson@slatech.org](mailto:linda.dawson@slatech.org).

<sup>1</sup> "Potential Economic Impacts of Improved Education on the United States" (Alliance for Excellent Education, Washington, DC: Updated October 2009), [http://www.all4ed.org/files/National\\_econ.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/National_econ.pdf) (accessed March 2010).

<sup>2</sup> "Financing Alternative Education Pathways: Profiles and Policy 2005," Thakur, Mala B. and Kristen Henry, National Youth Employment Coalition, Washington, DC: 2005), <http://www.nycc.org/page.cfm?pageID=141> (accessed March 2010). Page 8 includes recommendations on measures that consider student progress over time and relative gains.

<sup>3</sup> "Toward a Growth-Centric Assessment Model: A White Paper from Pearson Educational Measurement," Thomas H. Fisher and Jon S. Twing, Pearson Educational Measurement, April 2006.

<sup>4</sup> "Dropout Recovery Discussion Group Report and Policy Recommendations (Draft)," American Youth Policy Forum, Washington, DC. Retrieved March 18, 2010, from <http://www.aypf.org/projects/DropoutRecovery/DraftFinalReport.doc>.

<sup>5</sup> "Engaging Students to Improve Community Well-Being," Gallup, November 17, 2009. Retrieved March 18, 2010 from <http://www.gallup.com/video/123893/Engage-Students-Improve-Community.aspx>. Additional information on the Gallup Student Poll can be found at <http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com>.

<sup>6</sup> "Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts," (Almeida, Cheryl, Cassius Johnson, and Adria Steinberg of Jobs for the Future, Washington, DC: April 2006) <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/making-good-promise-what-policymakers-ca/278> (accessed March 2010), page 7 includes recommendations that states adopt systems that more accurately count dropouts.

<sup>7</sup> "The Reenrollment of High School Dropouts in One Large, Urban School District," Tony Fong, Beth Ann Berliner, and Vanessa Barrat, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2008. Adjust the dropout rate.

<sup>8</sup> "Financing Alternative Education Pathways: Profiles and Policy 2005," Thakur, Mala B. and Kristen Henry, National Youth Employment Coalition, Washington, DC: 2005). <http://www.nyec.org/page.cfm?pageID=141> (accessed March 2010). Page 8 includes recommendations on competency-based approaches.

<sup>9</sup> "Closing the Graduation Gap: A Superintendent's Guide for Planning Multiple Pathways to Graduation," MetisNet, Youth Transition Funders Group, October 2008, p. 25. "Re recuperative strategies may require moving beyond the Carnegie Unit seat-time requirements to offer competency-based approaches that focus on mastery of key academic skills and standards."

<sup>10</sup> "Achieving Graduation for All: A Governor's Guide to Dropout Prevention and Recovery," National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Washington, DC: October 22, 2009, p. 36. Retrieved March 18, 2010 from <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0910ACHIEVINGGRADUATION.PDF>.

<sup>11</sup> "Whatever it Takes: How Twelve Communities are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth," Nancy Martin and Samuel Halperin, American Youth Policy Forum, Washington, DC: 2006, p. 163.

[Questions submitted for the record and their responses follow:]

U.S. CONGRESS,  
Washington, DC, October 14, 2011.

Mr. BILL JACKSON,  
GreatSchools, 160 Spear Street, Suite 1020, San Francisco, CA 94105.

DEAR MR. JACKSON: Thank you for testifying before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education at the hearing entitled, "Education Reforms: Ensuring the Education System is Accountable to Parents and Communities," on Wednesday, September 21, 2011. I appreciate your participation.

Enclosed are additional questions submitted by members of the Committee after the hearing. Please provide written responses no later than October 28, 2011 for inclusion in the final hearing record. Responses should be sent to Dan Shorts of the Committee staff who can be contacted at (202) 225-6558.

Thank you again for your important contribution to the work of the Committee.  
Sincerely,

DUNCAN D. HUNTER, *Chairman,*  
*Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education.*

REPRESENTATIVE MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI)

1. Socioeconomically disadvantaged parents may not be able to access your website or understand how to use the information to advocate for their children. On September 14, in our committee, Superintendent Carvalho of Miami-Dade schools discussed his district's Parent Academies (<http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/>). Would you support Parent Academies to help parents use the information you're providing?



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160 Spear Street, Suite 1020  
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415.577.0790

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[www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org)

October 28, 2011

The Honorable Duncan D. Hunter  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,  
Elementary and Secondary Education  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6100

Dear Chairman Hunter:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee on September 21, 2011. As requested, below is my response to Representative Mazie Hirono's additional question.

**Question:** *Socioeconomically disadvantaged parents may not be able to access your website or understand how to use the information to advocate for their children. On September 14, in our committee, Superintendent Carvalho of Miami-Dade schools discussed his district's Parent Academies. Would you support Parent Academies to help parents use the information you're providing?*

**Answer:** Parent academies, district-driven efforts to build parent knowledge and skills, are one promising approach to engaging parents without Internet access. The Miami-Dade Parent Academy, for example, has reached thousands of Miami-Dade parents with information about supporting their children's education and continuing their own education. Parents value Miami-Dade Parent Academy services highly. Like others, Miami-Dade Parent Academy serves as a local hub for a range of tools and resources available to help parents with their children's education. In fact, Miami-Dade Parent Academy partners with GreatSchools to bring digital media resources to the Miami-Dade community.

There are other non-Internet models of parent education worthy of consideration, as well. For example, Avance, a Texas-focused nonprofit, offers a year-long series of classes for parents covering a broad range of knowledge and skills from childhood nutrition to creating a rich learning environment at home. Also, Parents as Teachers, a Missouri-based organization, develops curriculum and trains early childhood teachers and other professionals to work with parents on skills they need to support their children's school success. Both of these programs have undergone evaluations that demonstrate positive impact on parent behavior and student outcomes.

I'd like to add two other perspectives on this question:



First, teachers and schools themselves play a critical role in building the connection between school and family. In our work, we've noted that some teachers and schools are much better at this than others. Think College Now, a K-5 school in Oakland, California, is an example of a district school that does this well. Rocketship Education, a California charter management organization, is an example of a charter management organization with strong skills in this area. Some districts, such as Boston Public Schools, choose to focus more on building the capacity of teachers themselves to be ambassadors to parents, rather than create a separate parent academy infrastructure. In a world of limited resources, this may be the best approach for some schools or districts.

Second, thanks in part to growing Internet access, digital media is quickly becoming accessible to a wider range of parents. According to a 2009 report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 77 percent of parents with minor children have broadband access at home, compared with 63 percent of adults overall. Among parents with an annual household income between \$20,000 and \$50,000, specifically, 66 percent have broadband access, including 69 percent of African American and Hispanic parents. We expect these numbers to continue to grow due to the efforts of companies like Comcast, which is providing low-cost broadband to low-income homes (Horrigan, J. 2009. Home Broadband Adoption 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2009/Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.pdf>).

Sincerely,

Bill Jackson  
CEO and Founder

U.S. CONGRESS,  
Washington, DC, October 14, 2011.

Ms. LAURA W. KALOI,  
*National Center for Learning Disabilities, 12523 Summer Place, Oak Hill, VA 20171.*

DEAR MS. KALOI: Thank you for testifying before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education at the hearing entitled, "Education Reforms: Ensuring the Education System is Accountable to Parents and Communities," on Wednesday, September 21, 2011. I appreciate your participation.

Enclosed are additional questions submitted by members of the Committee after the hearing. Please provide written responses no later than October 28, 2011 for inclusion in the final hearing record. Responses should be sent to Dan Shorts of the Committee staff who can be contacted at (202) 225-6558.



Thank you again for your important contribution to the work of the Committee.  
Sincerely,

DUNCAN D. HUNTER, *Chairman,*  
*Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education.*

REPRESENTATIVE MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI)

1. What percent of students who are later identified with disabilities had access to high-quality early learning experiences?

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**Response to Questions Submitted From Ms. Kaloi**

It was my honor to testify before Chairman Duncan Hunter and the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education on September 21, 2011 at the hearing entitled “Education Reforms: Ensuring the Education System is Accountable to Parents and Communities.” Thank you for your question, “What percent of students who are later identified with disabilities had access to high quality early learning experiences?”

Studies have found that pre-schooling programs significantly reduce the rate of special education placement. For example:

- An in-depth study of the effect of pre-schooling on special education undertaken by Conyers et al. (2002), using data from the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program, showed that special education placement was lower for pre-school children as far as grade 8 (with no data collected beyond 8th grade). The effect is broadly consistent across disability types (not all disability types could be identified in the research because of small samples). Except for emotional/behavioral disorders (where there is no difference), pre-school attendance is associated with special education placement rates which are lower by: 60% for mental retardation; 32% for speech/language impairment; 38% for specific learning disabilities.

- A study by Temple et al. (2010) found that preschool participation reduced the likelihood of school remediation. The effects of preschool were greater for children from families with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The beneficial effects of preschool on special education placement were also larger for boys than girls.

Certainly more research needs to be done in this area. However, given that a nation-wide study by the Center for Special Education Finance (2004) found that the average expenditure per special education student is 1.91 times more than for children in regular classes, avoiding assignment to special education by providing quality early childhood education has not only a significant human reward but a substantial financial benefit as well.

Please contact me with any questions and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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[Whereupon, at 11:30 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

