



Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats

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Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (D-VA), House Education and Workforce Committee Markup of H.R. 5, the "*Student Success Act*"

Mr. Chairman, today we are here to begin the reauthorization process for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a landmark civil rights law. As we approach the fifty-year anniversary of its enactment, we cannot take lightly its mission and goal.

Fifty years ago, we, as a country, recognized -- and I'm quoting from the original bill "the special educational needs of children of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs."

We recognized that for many politically disconnected populations in this country, it was necessary for the federal government to fill gaps in the funding of our public education system. While education would remain a fundamentally local issue, we recognized that our local funding system produced, and would continue to produce, large gaps in equity.

And to fill these gaps, the federal government could step in on behalf of a compelling community interest to foster an educated citizenry. Congress decided 50 years ago that providing the supplemental resources needed to ensure all children had access to a quality public education was a national interest. ESEA is not a general education fund for all. It provides limited funding targeted to the schools and students who get left behind in an unequal system.

Over the years we have reauthorized the bill and found ways to create a more equitable system. While the original bill focused primarily on low-income and minority students, we recognized that students with disabilities and non-native English speaking students also faced local educational systems unprepared and sometimes unwilling to provide the resources they needed. It is in the recognition of that history that we turn to our markup of H.R. 5 today.

H.R. 5 would lock-in low funding levels without the ability to adjust appropriations for inflation and dramatically alter how precious federal resources are allocated. The bill weakens or eliminates many protections for poor and minority students, fails to provide a well-rounded education for all students, and fails to support our nation's educators. In short, this bill would turn back the clock on equity and accountability in American public education.

As such, Democrats will offer amendments today to fix H.R. 5's glaring problems with sound, evidence-based policies. The Democratic amendments will:

- Ensure that states set high standards and goals so that students graduate from high school college- and career-ready;
- Support state-driven accountability and school improvement systems that hold schools responsible for the success of *all* students while ensuring that schools have the resources and support they need to be successful;
- Promote policies that improve the effectiveness, working conditions, and professional development supports for our nation's teachers and principals; and
- Authorize a federal investment reflective of need and targeted to the communities most in need of supplemental federal dollars

Taken together, the Democratic amendments will reinforce ESEA's bedrock equity protections that H.R. 5 would dismantle. Our amendments aim to ensure that every child in our country gets the education they deserve – regardless of poverty, disability, or other challenges. Taken together, the Democratic amendments place a high-quality education for all children at the center of this ESEA reauthorization; exactly where it should be.

We are faced with tremendous opportunity to bring our education system into the 21st century. We, Democrats and Republicans, have the chance to work together and ensure that all students have access to a world-class education that prepares them for success in the global economy.

We can find unity where we agree and compromise where we differ. Unfortunately, our Republican colleagues have dismissed every plea for cooperation, and are pushing a bill that would take American public education in the wrong direction. This approach does a disservice to our deliberative process and to the people we were sent here to represent.

H.R. 5 is a disservice to the history of ESEA, and, more importantly, a disservice to our nation's schools and their students. Instead of building on what we have learned in the last 13 years and proceeding in a deliberative manner with this reauthorization, H.R. 5 engages in political gimmickry and shortchanges our schools and students.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all my colleagues to reject this bill and instead support the Democratic amendments.

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