

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)**

Full Committee Hearing

*"The State of American Education"*

Wednesday, February 5, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Chairman Walberg. Good morning, everyone, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing.

I would first like to start with the elephant in the room. There is current reporting that President Trump plans to issue an executive order to eliminate critical programs at the Department of Education and call on Congress to eliminate the entire department. But then I recall that that's exactly what Project 2025 said the president should do — it said that on page 319 of Project 2025.

The irony is not lost on me that we are here to discuss the "state of American education" while the current Administration is actively discussing how to dismantle the main federal agency responsible for ensuring safe, quality education for all students. According to polls, the majority of voters oppose the abolition of the Department of Education. I also know that I, and every Democrat, will do what we can to ensure the Department continues.

Now to the issue at hand. As reflected in the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, schools are struggling to make up for lost time in the classroom following the COVID-19 pandemic. Achievement gaps, which existed before the pandemic, have widened. According to that assessment, math and reading gaps between higher- and lower-performing students continue to rise, as Black students continue to be more than 10 points behind their white peers in all subjects.

In 2021, Democrats passed the largest one-time investment in education in the history of the United States in the *American Rescue Plan Act* (ARPA), to provide schools with the resources they needed to reopen classrooms safely and make up for lost time due to the pandemic. Without this investment, we would undoubtedly be in a worse situation today. However, the *American Rescue Plan Act* was only a band-aid on the larger issue of underfunding in schools. It is abundantly clear that we need sustained federal investment over time to overcome decades of underfunding.

Unfortunately, instead of investing in our children, Republicans are stuck on proposals that will only create more challenges for students. Consider that the first education bill we considered this Congress targets – indeed bullies – transgender youth. Also, my Republican colleagues have misrepresented programs intended to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion as a problem in education. Republicans have threatened to ban books, police bathrooms, and take away funds from communities that need them most. Simply put, the Administration is promoting a warped version of DEI – discrimination, erasure, and inequity.

This all serves to distract Americans so that they will not notice the privatization of the American education system with taxpayer funds going to private schools, the resegregation of public schools, the erosion of services

for students with disabilities, cuts to the student loan program, *and* distracts from the price of eggs going up. And while some folks may be hollering about imagined “DEI problems,” many in the public will fail to notice how the taxpayers’ money is being siphoned away from public education and the student loan program to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy and well-connected.

And so, Mr. Chairman, I know that we can all agree that every student in this country should have access to a safe, welcoming, and well-funded learning environment. That begins with eliminating disparities in education with sustained federal funding. This Congress, Committee Democrats will reintroduce legislation such as:

- the *Rebuild America’s Schools Act*, which would make a critical investment to repair and rebuild school facilities—particularly in high-need areas.
- the *Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act*, which would restore the private right of action for students, parents, and local civil rights groups to bring discrimination claims based on disparate impact under Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.
- And the *Strength in Diversity Act*, which would provide resources to states or school districts that want to voluntarily develop plans to integrate their schools.

We have to take steps to lower the cost of higher education for students and families. To that end, we’ll also reintroduce the *Lowering Obstacles to Achievement Now (LOAN) Act*, which would lower the cost of college for current and future student borrowers and their families by making critical reforms to the student aid system, including doubling the Pell Grant, improving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and making loans more affordable and accessible.

Allow me, to that end, to promise to my colleagues and students across the country, that we will not go along with programs to dismantle our education system. We will fight any attempt to dismantle the Department. We don’t know what the plan will be, but count on our opposition to any plan that will abolish the Department of Education and the programs in it. To that end, Democrats will always be for the wellbeing of students, teachers, and parents across the country.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.