

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

Monday, September 10, 2007
Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On
“Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft of ESEA Reauthorization”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “Miller/McKeon Discussion Draft of ESEA Reauthorization”*

Good morning and welcome.

All parents – no matter where they live, how much they earn, or what color their skin – want their children to go to a good school, to do well academically, and to go on to college or to a good, rewarding job.

And as a nation concerned with our leadership in the world, the strength of our economy, and the vitality of our democracy, we must ensure that every child receives the best possible education.

We have known for decades that too many children – particularly poor and minority children – were being deprived of the opportunity of a decent education that could help them to lead more successful and gratifying lives.

Six years ago we finally came together on a bipartisan basis to do something about that.

We asked states to set higher standards for their schools and students. We did this because we believed that every child could succeed – if given access to a highly qualified teacher and a sound curriculum in a good school.

We made performance at our schools transparent and began to hold schools accountable for their performance.

These were historic and positive changes.

However, we didn't get it all right when we enacted No Child Left Behind. In increasing numbers and with increasing urgency, the American people are telling us that the No Child Left Behind Act is not fair, not flexible, and not adequately funded.

We will not waver when it comes to the accountability goals and standards of the current law. That's not negotiable.

But we would be negligent, whether because of hubris or for other shortsighted reasons, to refuse to make significant improvements to the law – improvements that are necessary for it to succeed as we intended in 2001 and 2002.

America’s education law must insist on accountability with high expectations, high standards, and high-quality assessments. It must be a law that closes the achievement gap and helps all children learn.

That same law must treat children and schools fairly – and provide educators with the flexibility and resources they need to succeed.

Fortunately, we are not faced with a choice between more accountability and less accountability. Rather, we face the obligation and opportunity to finish what we started – to ensure that our system of educational accountability is smart and effective.

In late August and early September, Mr. McKeon, Mr. Kildee, Mr. Castle and I released a bipartisan discussion draft of the reauthorization legislation. It has inspired a vigorous and welcome discussion about how we can improve the law.

We took the unprecedented step of releasing the bipartisan discussion draft to ensure that the public would have ample opportunity to consider and comment on the direction my colleagues and I believe we must take – before we formally introduce a bill.

This reauthorization process has been one of the most open, transparent, and bipartisan processes that I have had the privilege to participate in.

The bipartisan discussion draft reflects years’ worth of discussions with parents, teachers, and administrators.

It reflects the input of members of Congress from both parties and across the ideological spectrum. It reflects testimony delivered in nearly two dozen Congressional hearings. And it reflects the recommendations of more than 100 education, civil rights, and business organizations.

A good process, however, is the result of more than just logistics. More than anything, the changes we are recommending are motivated by the aspirations and expectations of parents for their children. We must do better, and we can do better.

Here’s how we can do it.

For starters, we must have a clearer, richer, and more informed understanding of what’s happening inside our schools. That’s why our discussion draft creates a smarter system of accountability that judges schools on more than just a single test given on a single day.

Emphasis will continue to be on reading and math achievement, but we will also allow the use of additional valid and reliable measures to assess student learning and school performance more fairly, comprehensively, and accurately.

We want to make sure that schools get credit for the progress they make with students over time. That's why we create a smarter system of accountability that includes growth models for crediting schools for gains in student achievement.

Even better, these growth models will give us information that will be timely and helpful to teachers and principals in implementing reforms.

To be successful, our system of accountability must encourage states to set high standards. Lowering the bar so that more children reach it is a sham.

Across the country, employers say that high school graduates are not ready for the workplace, while colleges say that high school graduates are not ready for the college classroom.

Our bipartisan discussion draft asks business and higher education leaders to come together and work with educators to develop more rigorous state standards so that high school graduates will be ready for the next stage of their lives.

We must have a smarter system of accountability that distinguishes among different schools and the challenges facing them, as well as their needs for addressing those challenges.

Schools with specific problems in specific areas should be allowed to use the instructional interventions most appropriate to their needs. Schools facing greater challenges must receive more intensive support. Only in this way will we truly target our resources appropriately.

We will never achieve the goals of No Child Left Behind unless we change the way we treat teachers and principals.

As a nation we are not offering teachers the respect and support they deserve, and as a result we are facing a teacher shortage crisis. It's long past time that we treated teachers like valued partners in the education system.

The bipartisan discussion draft provides incentives that will bring top talent into the classrooms that need it most. These include teacher career ladders, improved working conditions, mentoring for new teachers, and performance pay for principals and teachers based on fair and proven models developed in collaboration with principals and teachers.

As we seek to make improvements to the law, we also need to ensure that states have adequate resources to make the law a success. We need greater and sustained investments in American education.

In the new Congress, the Democratic Leadership has begun this new era of investment. Rather than fight against it, President Bush should join it. A great American education system for our children and our country cannot be built on the cheap.

We will continue to insist upon high standards and high expectations for all children: poor children, minority children, children with disabilities, and English language learners. There is no question about that.

But it is equally clear that in order to accomplish our shared and critical goal of meeting the expectations and aspirations of America's parents, we must make improvements to current law.

I am excited to hear from our panels today as we continue the open process we began last year.

We will hear from 44 experts from the education, civil rights, business, philanthropic, and research communities. I expect we will have a lively and informative discussion. I want to thank all of witnesses for their time and expertise.

<http://edlabor.house.gov>