



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Sablan (NMI At-Large)

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Back to School: Meeting Students Social and Emotional Needs

Tuesday, September 20, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

As students across the country return to the classroom for the 2022-2023 school year, the Committee is meeting today to discuss how our nation's schools are helping students get back on track academically and meet their social and emotional needs.

The pandemic underscored how important schools are to our nation's children, families, and communities. While the initial shift to online learning certainly saved lives, not being in the classroom impeded students' social and emotional development and disrupted the stability that helps young people thrive.

That is why Democrats have been focused on providing key resources for students and educators so they could return to the classroom safely. Thanks to President Biden's American Rescue Plan nearly all public K-12 schools in the nation are now open for in-person learning.

We know students and educators lost ground, however, academically—as evidenced by the most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress—and in terms of social and emotional learning. That is why the American Rescue Plan requires that school districts target 20 percent of funding towards addressing learning loss using evidence-based interventions and focusing on those students who were most impacted by the pandemic.

We now have data from a national survey of more than 800 public schools, conducted by the Department of Education, that shows 98 percent of those schools are implementing learning-recovery programs, like tutoring and remedial instruction, and over 70 percent of those schools have shored up mental health supports. Let me give you some examples:

- In Virginia, a school district is using Rescue Plan money to hire more tutors to help close achievement gaps.
- In Connecticut, a school district created a parent academy program to connect parents to their children's education.
- In Ohio, a school district used Rescue Plan funding to create a family resource center—a one-stop-shop that connects families to mental health resources and support services.
- In North Carolina, a school district was able to bring in more mental health counselors.
- And in my district, the Northern Mariana Islands, schools used the American Rescue Plan funding for a summer learning program and hired more teachers to work with students who need additional support.

Importantly, these programs are already showing signs of success. Research estimates that high-dosage tutoring three times a week for a year can help students gain 19 weeks in instructional time, that a double-dose of math each day for a year can produce 10 weeks of gains, and that summer learning can help students gain the equivalent of 5 more weeks.

Additionally, the research shows that social and emotional learning programs can significantly improve student academic performance and social behaviors, while also lowering levels of distress.

Simply put, Democrats have helped states and school districts invest in evidence-based programs that can help students get back on track.

Let's contrast this with my colleague's response to the pandemic.

While Democrats are focused on getting students back to school safely, Republican politicians wanted students in school regardless of whether it was safe or not.

While Democrats delivered historic funding to help schools manage the fallout of the pandemic, every Republican lawmaker voted against the American Rescue Plan.

Now, as Democrats continue to focus on making up for lost instructional time, Republican politicians are politicizing our classrooms and attacking teachers.

That is wrong.

We need to stay focused on getting students back to where they would have been, if the pandemic had not gotten in their way.

And we need to stay focused on delivering sustained funding to K-12 schools—particularly in communities with the greatest need—over the long term.

Because, whatever your politics, surely, we can all agree our nation needs its citizens to be well-educated—during times of emergency and at all times.

Finally, I want to conclude with a thank you to teachers across the nation—including in my far-flung district of the Northern Mariana Islands, which is 14 hours ahead of us—thank you as you begin a new school year: Thank you for devoting yourself to the well-being of our nation's students. Your commitment to your students is a lesson to us all; and we are working to make sure you have the resources you need to help your students and their families succeed.