



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Hearing

Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education

Thursday, June 24, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, we are meeting to discuss the Department of Education's budget request for Fiscal Year 2022 and examine the Department's priorities to support students, educators, and communities.

Secretary Cardona, welcome to the Committee on Education and Labor and thank you for being with us today. Today, we look forward to hearing your vision to expand access to quality education and help students and schools recover from the pandemic.

At the beginning of this Administration, you inherited an Education Department that spent four years moving in the wrong direction. Under the Trump Administration, the Department:

- Failed to provide meaningful guidance to help students cope with the pandemic;
- Eroded civil rights protections for students;
- Failed to faithfully implement the *Every Student Succeeds Act*; and

- Withheld debt relief from hundreds of thousands of students who were defrauded by low-quality institutions while refusing to hold these institutions accountable.

Mr. Secretary, under your leadership, the Biden-Harris Administration has made critical progress toward restoring the Department's commitment to students and educators.

In March, the Administration worked with Congress to pass the *American Rescue Plan Act*. This package provided the largest one-time federal investment in K-12 education in our nation's history and distributed it using the Title I-A formula so that the greatest resources went to communities with the greatest needs.

This funding has allowed school districts to reopen safely, remain open, and make up for lost time in the classroom.

While others have demanded that schools reopen, the Rescue Act secured the resources to help schools reopen safely. The funding allows schools to:

- Purchase personal protective equipment,

- Repair and replace broken ventilation systems, and
- Take other steps to follow C-D-C guidance for reopening schools safely.

Importantly, school districts are also using this funding to help students get back on track after the pandemic. Districts must dedicate 20 percent of the funding they received to address learning loss and support students' social and emotional well-being.

I want to recognize the Department for providing school districts with evidence-based guidance on how to use the relief to support students and reopen classrooms.

Because of these efforts, schools finally have the resources and support they need. As of April, 96 percent of K-8 schools were already open for hybrid or full-time in-person learning. As Dr. James Lane, the state superintendent in my home state, noted, quote: "These resources will help keep students and teachers remain healthy and safe." I would now like to enter into the record a letter from Dr. Lane supporting these critical investments.

The American Rescue Plan is also helping institutions of higher education weather the pandemic. The package provided a financial lifeline for institutions grappling with devastating enrollment declines and revenue losses. And it required that an institution dedicate at least half of the funding they received for direct aid to help students avoid hunger, homelessness, and other hardships.

These critical investments are helping students, schools, and institutions to the road of recovery. Yet, we must look beyond restoring the pre-pandemic status quo that already left far too many students behind.

Today, we will discuss how the Department's budget request, the American Jobs Plan, and the American Families Plan would build back a better education system where everyone can succeed.

Drawing from the *America's College Promise Act*, the American Families Plan invests in providing tuition-free community college and reducing costs for students at H-B-C-Us and other minority serving institutions. The package also provides a historic increase in Pell Grants, which would help more students get a quality degree.

The American Jobs Plan also includes promising funding to help schools retrofit dangerously outdated school buildings, including ventilation systems. And it provides community colleges with the necessary resources to modernize campus facilities and technological infrastructure.

Today, we also look forward to hearing what the Department's budget will do to:

- Confront persistent academic achievement gaps,
- Restore access to education for students with disabilities,
- Lower the cost of college, and,
- Ensure that all students have access to the quality education they need to reach their full potential.

Mr. Secretary, thank you, again, for joining us today. I am now pleased to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member of the Committee, Dr. Foxx, the gentlelady from North Carolina, for the purpose of making an opening statement.