

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
House Committee on Education and the Workforce
“Strengthening Education Research and Privacy Protections to Better Serve Students”
Full Committee Hearing – March 22, 2016, 10 a.m.

Thank you Chairman Kline for holding this hearing, and thank you to the panelists for taking time out of your day to testify before the Committee.

Gone are the days when education was flashcards and workbooks.

Today’s students use electronic tablets and smartphones, apps, online study tools, and various other technological resources to aid them in their studies. Teachers have the ability to extend learning beyond the classroom using digital learning platforms to share multimedia resources and engage parents in their children’s learning.

Educational technology generates information that can be instrumental in improving a student’s learning experience. The data from these tools allow teachers to more accurately assess student progress and provide

interventions to ensure children are learning. Data can also assist schools in making district strategy and curriculum decisions. Many states now use longitudinal data systems to link student achievement data from pre-K through grade 12, or even past college and into the workforce. This enables district and state leaders to make informed, data-driven policy choices.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) also helps provide education practitioners with scientifically-sound, relevant, and accessible findings that can inform decision-making and instructional practice. Through the delivery of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, various research projects and surveys, randomized control trials, provision of technical assistance to states, and dissemination of research, IES provides a novel approach to harnessing data collection and educational technology to improve instructional practice and systems management.

While the use of technology in education continues to expand, we must take the necessary steps to protect the privacy and data of students and their families. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act was enacted 40 years ago to address privacy concerns in a time of paper student records. Innovative educational technology tools capture large amounts of student data, and many districts now contract with private vendors to use online, cloud-based storage for students.

Congress must ensure student data is being used only for defined educational purposes and cannot be sold or used for private companies' financial gain. Parents should know who has access to student data and how it is being used and protected. And teachers and school leaders need to understand how to properly protect student information while taking advantage of the powerful digital learning tools at their disposal.

As we examine student privacy and improve education research and data collection, we need to balance privacy with innovation. Students,

teachers, and parents need to feel comfortable that student data is protected. At the same time, we need to be careful not to limit the advancement of new educational technologies or the breadth of ways data can be used to improve student performance.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this balancing act and other relevant issues regarding these topics. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.