

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

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

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Tuesday, May 16, 2023 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Dr. Foxx.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that tomorrow is the 69th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In the decision, the Chief Justice wrote: “*In the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.*”

Now, almost 70 years later, America’s public schools are as segregated by race and class today as they were in the late 1960s. According to a Government Accountability Office report last year, more than a third of public school students attend a racially segregated school. Tomorrow, I will reintroduce legislation—the *Strength in Diversity Act* and *Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act*—to meaningfully address school segregation and finally realize the promise of *Brown*.

Now, Mr. Secretary, good morning, and thank you for being with us today. I am pleased to state that, under your leadership, the Biden-Harris Administration has helped restore the Department’s commitment to supporting public schools, supporting students, and supporting educators.

Two years ago, as the Chair pointed out, we secured the largest, one-time federal investment in K-12 education in our nation’s history in the American Rescue Plan, which made it possible for schools to reopen safely, stay open safely, address learning loss, and respond to students’ mental and social-emotional needs. And we ensured that the greatest resources went to those with the greatest need.

This Administration has forgiven more than \$38 billion in student loan debt for 1.75 million borrowers, including loan borrowers who were defrauded by their institutions. And it has helped provide borrowers with a clear pathway to repayment by improving the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and Income Driven Repayment.

The Department has also helped protect students’ safety and civil rights by updating the Title IX rule and issuing new guidance to protect students with disabilities from discriminatory discipline practices.

These are just some of the key steps the Department, under this Administration, has taken to deliver for students and educators.

Today, we look forward to hearing more about how the President’s budget proposal will build on this progress.

As is often said, a budget proposal is a statement of values. The investments we choose to make—or choose not to make—are a clear way for the American people to see whether their elected officials are putting their taxpayers' money where their mouths are.

The President's budget proposal reflects a continued commitment to expanding access to high-quality education at every level. Here are just a few examples.

The proposal shores up funding to help underserved schools close achievement gaps and sustain programs that are helping students recover from the pandemic.

To lower the cost of college, the budget proposes an \$820 increase to the maximum Pell Grant award as well as a down payment toward free community college.

And it boosts funding for career and technical education, which is critical for our economy.

These investments will be transformational for our education system.

Regrettably, my Republican colleagues have chosen to use their time in the majority to pursue policies that harm students and roll back the clock on our progress.

Last month, House Republicans passed a bill that makes devastating cuts to programs for our students and educators.

It eliminates billions of dollars for schools serving low-income students—equivalent to removing more than 60,000 educators and staff from classrooms.

The proposal reduces funding for support for as many as 7.5 million students with disabilities.

It also makes college more expensive by eliminating Pell Grants for 80,000 students and reducing the maximum award for the remaining 6.6 million recipients.

Finally, it eliminates badly needed student debt relief for more than 40 million eligible borrowers.

Our nation's students and educators deserve better.

We should be working together to address the urgent challenges in education, such as rebuilding and modernizing school infrastructure, addressing achievement gaps, protecting student's civil rights, and lowering the cost of college for current and future borrowers.

Committee Democrats have introduced—and will continue to introduce—legislation that take key steps toward these goals. Simply put, when we invest in education, students can succeed.

So, thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your time and for your work to help every student access a high-quality education.