

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

Full Committee Hearing

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

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, May 7, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Dr. Foxx.

And good morning, Mr. Secretary, and thank you for being with us today.

Seventy years ago, this month, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in the majority opinion, the unanimous opinion, of *Brown v. Board of Education*: ‘In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.’

The Court went on to say that segregation of students by race denies the children of the minority race of an equal education opportunity because segregated schools are inherently unequal.

But regrettably today, we must acknowledge that in 2024, America’s public schools are as segregated by race and class as they were in the late 1960s.

Today, we have a chance to hear from Secretary Cardona about how the Biden-Harris Administration is working to finally fulfill the promise of *Brown* and bolster support for students and teachers while also tackling the systemic inequities present in our public school system.

For example, last Congress, Democrats and President Biden acted to pass the American Rescue Plan Act— without the support of a single Republican vote— to deliver the largest one-time federal investment in K-12 education in our nation’s history. And the investment was allocated using the Title I-A formula, meaning the greatest resources went to the communities with the greatest needs.

These resources also allowed school districts to make up for missed time in the classroom, respond to students' mental and social-emotional needs, and support educators. What the research shows is that the federal investments resulted in marked improvement in school children in Chicago, Birmingham, and Nashville and other cities and counties around the country.

Additionally, the Department of Education has also taken historic steps to relieve student borrowers of mountains of unaffordable debt. This Administration has forgiven more than \$160 billion dollars in student loan debt for 4.6 million borrowers, including some who were duped by their universities. By enhancing Income Driven Repayment plans and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, future borrowers now have a clear path to repayment.

So today, I look forward to hearing from the Secretary about how the Department, what the present status is, in getting the Free Application for Student Federal Student Aid – the FAFSA – rollout back on track. As you know, the Committee has communicated with you our concerns about the impact of the many delays on the students' college decisions.

Committee Democrats have pressed for policies to ensure that every student has access to a quality education. At the same time, Republicans have prioritized divisive culture-war issues that politicized classrooms, pushed book-banning legislation, and were consumed with who uses which bathroom.

Moreover, my colleagues frequently speak about the commitment to fighting campus discrimination. Yet, their actions tell a different story. Congressional Republicans have advocated significant cuts in the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights funding, which would inevitably hinder its ability to investigate and prosecute campus-related discrimination claims.

Unfortunately, this seems to be where my colleagues are on the other side of the aisle, where we often come to an impasse.

Because complaining about a problem is not a solution. At the end of the day, if we want to reduce rising tensions on college campuses, we need to advance meaningful legislation to actually address the problem.

Passing meaningless resolutions week after week and turning the Committee room into a political spectacle only seems to have exacerbated the problem instead of diffusing it.

Our students deserve more than to be used as pawns in politicians' games and fundraising schemes.

So, to that end, I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your testimony, and I look forward to what I hope to be a productive discussion.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back.