



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

**Opening Statement of Chairman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (NMI-At Large)**

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

*Serving All Students: Promoting a Healthier, More Supportive School Environment*

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 12:15 p.m. | Zoom

---

Today, we are meeting to discuss the federal government's role in helping schools create supportive environments that help all students learn and grow.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored how important schools are to our nation's children, families, and communities. While the initial shift to online learning saved lives, it also restricted access to essential services like social and emotional development, healthy nutrition, and the stability that allows students to thrive.

In my district, COVID-19 has had the greatest impact on students with disabilities, Title I qualified students, English learners, and other vulnerable students that already faced significant challenges.

For students to fully recover from the pandemic and get back on track, children and parents must have the assurance that they are returning to supportive classroom environments.

Unfortunately, we know that this is not always the case.

Data from the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights indicate that far too many students experienced harmful discipline practices like corporal punishment, seclusion, and restraint.

Over 100,000 students were physically restrained, mechanically restrained, or secluded in public schools during the 2017-18 school year, the last year data were collected.

Nineteen states still allow teachers to strike students in classrooms.

And these practices disproportionately impact Black and Latino students and students with disabilities.

Research shows that corporal punishment, seclusion, and restraint are linked to lower academic achievement, higher rates of mental health problems, chronic absenteeism, and a higher risk of substance abuse. Tragically, seclusion and restraint practices have also injured teachers and led to students' death.

We also know – more clearly than ever before – that removing children from the classroom stifles academic growth and negatively impacts their mental health.

Even still, our education system continues to suspend or expel Black and Brown students at disproportionately higher rates than their peers.

These punitive practices are contradictory to what we know students need, and they reflect outdated initiatives, like zero-tolerance policies, that demanded harsh and counterproductive discipline.

Congress must work to help schools replace outdated practices with evidence-based strategies to create healthier school environments for all students. Research shows that mental health support and trauma informed care are critical alternatives that better foster students' development.

So, to that end, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan in March of 2021, which provided the largest one-time federal investment in K-12 schools to help them reopen and stay open safely and make up for lost time in the classroom.

This investment dedicated funding specifically to respond to students' academic, social, and emotional needs. An analysis of district level spending plans from FutureEd indicates that many schools are using funds to hire school counselors and mental health professionals who can support students' recovery from the pandemic.

In June, the Biden-Harris Administration also initiated a process to release new guidance for schools to implement discipline practices that protect students' civil rights.

In Congress, Democrats have introduced a number of legislative proposals to support students' health and wellbeing, including the *Keeping All Students Safe Act*, introduced by Chairman Scott and Congressman Beyer. I am a proud cosponsor of this bill.

The bill would:

- Prohibit seclusion practices in schools,
- Drastically reduce the use of physical restraints, and
- Provide educators the training and support they need to implement evidence-based strategies to build healthier school climates.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses this afternoon on the steps we must take to help schools implement proven practices that will support students' academic, social, and emotional development.

I now turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. Owens, for the purpose of making an opening statement.