

**Statement of Michael N. Castle
Chairman
Education Reform Subcommittee**

“Mark-up of H.R. 1, the No Child Left Behind Act”

Today, this committee takes its first step toward the enactment of H.R. 1, the No Child Left Behind Act -- our best effort to navigate the philosophical differences between our parties and realize our shared vision of a better future for all children. I would like to join with Chairman Boehner in thanking members on both sides of the aisle for their contributions to this bipartisan effort.

Prior to 1965, many poor and minority students were denied access to a quality education. In effect, this country had a two-tiered educational system -- one with low expectations for poor or minority students and high expectations for others.

After thirty-five years and more than \$130 billion in well intentioned Washington spending, we have yet to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. As a result, we have allowed ourselves to believe that some children are simply beyond our reach, and, as a result, this nation has suffered.

With the markup of H.R. 1, we rededicate ourselves to the notion that all children can learn and we initiate the reform of our public school system to ensure that no child graduates with limited potential because he or she is unable to read or write.

To that end, the No Child Left Behind Act grants unprecedented flexibility to local school districts in exchange for clear and measurable results. It also empowers parents and it provides new options students in failing schools.

Specifically, H.R. 1 builds and improves on the 1994 authorization, focusing on what will be taught and what should be learned at the state and local levels, and it asks schools to demonstrate their ability to drive student results by measuring how well -- or how poorly -- students perform from one year to another in reading and math.

Although the bill is careful to preserve a state's ability to design or select its own standards and assessments, the data required by H.R. 1 will help parents, teachers and other school personnel intervene as soon as a student begins to falter -- not after several years of failure.

In addition, H.R. 1 requires each state to sample students in 4th and 8th grade with NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or another independent test of the state's choosing to confirm the results of the state assessments. A second snapshot of state results, if you will.

Since the standards and assessments are developed at the state level, I believe that some sort of national measure is important to help the public monitor the quality of different standards and assessments in various states. While I believe NAEP is the only test that currently provides this sort of comparison, I appreciate the concerns of those who want flexibility in the selection of the independent test.

While I feel the need to preserve the balance of the agreement, I hope to work with my colleagues to better inform them about the NAEP and to ensure that we do not inadvertently promote low standards or low expectations for children in different regions of the country.

H.R. 1 also makes an historic investment in comprehensive, science-based education programs to ensure that all children are able to read by the end of 2nd grade.

To achievement this goal, H.R. 1 provides \$5 billion over five years to help states identify students who need special reading assistance, subsidize special training for teachers in effective reading instruction and intervention strategies, and implement successful reading programs in our schools.

More important, the majority of these funds are specifically targeted to schools with high percentages of students that are reading below grade level. As we all know, to be successful in math, science or history, our children must master the fundamentals of reading. H.R. 1 helps in that regard.

Finally, among other things, H.R. 1 seeks to address the current lack of accountability for education failure that has caused so many low-income parents to lose confidence in our public school system. For these schools -- where 90 percent of our children are educated -- we provide federal dollars and technical support as soon as they begin to fail.

Yet, after time and assistance, H.R. 1 recognizes that some schools, by virtue of mismanagement or chronic neglect, have not only failed to increase student achievement but have actually retarded educational progress. For these schools, we require significant restructuring.

And for the children, we provide a chance to learn -- either by allowing them to transfer to another, better performing public or charter school.

On the issue of private school choice, some question the wisdom of taking education funding away from public schools that cannot improve without it. I agree that we need to provide sufficient funds to ensure that we reach our most disadvantaged schools and our most vulnerable children. For this reason, H.R. 1 increases the authorization level for Title I and it concentrates federal ESEA dollars to help leverage the nationwide education reform envisioned by President Bush.

Still, I cannot ignore recent studies which seem to demonstrate that private school choice has actually spurred public schools to improve. While I believe that we need more research to determine how well this program works for our low-performing schools, I also believe that it would be a mistake to dismiss the immediate concerns of parents with children in failing schools that cannot afford to send them somewhere else.

I believe that we have a truly historic opportunity to fundamentally change the way children are educated in this country. While members on both sides of the aisle may have concerns about the specific provisions in this bill, I urge all of you -- regardless of your concerns -- not to allow this opportunity to help our children pass you by.

Get engaged and make this product better.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, this is only the dawn of this process, and I believe that we can resolve our differences. To that end, I look forward to working with all of you to achieve a remarkable education reform package during this period of comity between the White House and the Congress.