

House Committee on Education and Labor

Hearing on Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act “Supporting America’s Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders”

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Testimony by
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Hello, Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Kline, and distinguished members of the committee. I deeply appreciate this historic opportunity to provide testimony on the most important civil rights issue of our time, for I firmly believe that every child has a right to a good education.

As superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District, I’m here today on behalf of 87,000 students in California’s third largest school district – a school system that despite the tough obstacles of poverty, language barriers and our ongoing, multi-billion dollar cuts in state funding for education – continues to defy the odds and achieve steady, significant gains in student achievement.

I’ve provided several attachments to this written testimony showing that other experts nationwide have recognized the effectiveness of Long Beach schools, and that our approach merits replication elsewhere. A common theme in those attachments is that in Long Beach, data-driven accountability has become a way of life. Use of data is infused into our nationally recognized professional development and our Seamless Education Partnership with our local postsecondary institutions that produce most of our new teachers. Such professional development is required of all new teachers and administrators in our district. New teachers are not simply left to sink or swim in Long Beach. They’re supported by new-teacher coaches, and with ongoing training on how to use data to continually improve instruction throughout the school year.

In Long Beach, students speak 38 languages, and 70 percent of our children receive federally subsidized meals, yet students from all walks of life – from the inner city to the suburbs – are making academic gains because of our persistent focus on data-driven instruction and training.

Allow me to share a few of our best practices in Long Beach:

- We offer school choice to our parents, allowing them to select a school within our system, or if they so choose, to attend a school outside our district. Forty percent of our students are attending schools of choice.
- We were the first public school system in the United States to implement uniforms in kindergarten through eighth grade, and we now have two high schools in uniforms.

- We were the first to require any third grader reading below grade level to attend mandatory summer school, and the first to end social promotion, or the practice of passing students from one grade to the next whether they met grade level standards or not.
- Our Academic and Career Success For All Initiative aims to increase the college and career readiness of all students. It includes our College Promise program, which provides scholarships, a tuition-free first semester at our local city college, and guaranteed college admission at our local university for students who complete minimum requirements.
- Our Leadership Development Program prepares the next generation of school leaders by building a leadership pipeline, through new principal induction, teacher leader certification and other leadership development training.
- Our school improvement strategies include the pairing of some of our most successful school principals with our schools that need the most support. We use Response to Intervention strategies in a systemic fashion, providing tiered support to students and schools. This way, schools in need of greater support receive it, along with more structured guidance from our central office, while higher achieving schools are allowed greater flexibility at their site.
- We learn from other school districts, and other districts learn from us, in a systematic fashion. We have entered into a partnership with Fresno Unified School District, so that now we have the third and fourth largest school districts in California committed to sharing knowledge and resources to increase graduation rates and prepare students for college and the working world. We're especially focused on sharing with Fresno our best practices on English Language Learner instruction, leadership development, and math instruction.

Long Beach proves that our public schools, and our large, urban school systems, can overcome stubborn challenges. But we need your help. Despite our nationally recognized success in Long Beach, I truly believe that we can do much better if we make some key adjustments.

We recommend providing school districts like ours the maximum flexibility possible regarding the expenditure of federal funds. This can be done while assuring accountability, and we have helped to initiate a pending state senate bill, SB 1396, that proposes a pilot program to do just that in California.

We endorse the ESEA blueprint unveiled recently by President Obama. The blueprint would reward academic growth and innovation instead of simply sending more money to troubled school districts.

We welcome the president's emphasis on competitive grants. Competition drives reform by recognizing and rewarding success.

The president's blueprint contains a number of other features that we favor. I have attached additional information on our input regarding the blueprint.

We've made great progress in Long Beach, but we can and must accelerate our efforts with the help of sound federal policy. I look forward to working with you to achieve this aim, and I thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Attachments:

- A. Obama Plan Aims to Reward Performance (By Christopher J. Steinhauser)
- B. Reforms Bring International Acclaim
- C. Stanford U. Touts School Reform Here
- D. Seamless Education a 'National Model'
- E. Federal Review Praises Accountability
- F. Downtown School Wins National Award
- G. Senior U.S. Education Official Visits
- H. New Harvard Book Touts Long Beach
- I. America's Educators Look to Long Beach
- J. State Superintendent Praises LBUSD's Use of Data
- K. Use of Data Lauded by National Council
- L. LBUSD 'America's Crown Jewel'