

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing on “The National Mathematics Advisory Panel Report: Foundations for Success”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The National Mathematics Advisory Panel Report: Foundations for Success.”*

Good morning.

Welcome to today’s hearing on “The National Mathematics Advisory Panel Report: Foundations for Success.”

Twenty-five years ago, the release of *A Nation at Risk* first opened our eyes to an education system that was threatening our country’s global leadership. Decades later, we continue to face serious challenges to our nation’s economic competitiveness and future.

The Programme for International Student Assessments found that the U.S. lags far behind other developed nations in math and science education.

National Assessment of Education Progress scores are also sobering. They show that while the achievement gap is narrowing and elementary students are making some gains in math in lower grade levels, only about a third of our eighth-grade students are at or above proficiency in math. Less than a quarter of our high school seniors are at or above proficiency in math.

And just two months ago, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel released a report on the state of math education and instruction in our country. The panel concluded that our national system for teaching math is “broken and must be fixed” if we are to maintain our competitive edge.

We know that workplaces increasingly require that workers be able to work in teams across communities and continents. The jobs of the future will demand innovators with strong critical thinking and analytical skills.

Our students simply won’t be able to develop these skills without a solid foundation in math.

Today we are here to discuss the findings of the National Math Panel’s report and how we can improve U.S. math education in a meaningful way. We will closely examine two major shortcomings identified by this panel in how our children are learning and being taught math.

First, we have to raise our standards and expectations for math education. The current structure of the U.S. math curriculum is not conducive to helping students build math skills over time.

The curriculum in our nation's schools generally attempts to cover many topics at each grade level, meaning that each topic receives limited instructional time and inadequate concept development. Topics are introduced and then built upon in later years.

By comparison, top-performing nations tend to present fewer topics at each grade level, thus allowing teachers to explore topics in greater depth. This approach encourages students to develop full proficiency in one topic before moving on to more complex topics and allows students to better comprehend the subject at hand.

Second, we are not giving our teachers the training and support needed to provide effective math instruction to students. Teachers cannot be expected to teach what they do not know themselves.

We have to provide teachers with opportunities to learn math while they are still in school and to participate in professional development programs throughout their careers.

The panel recommends improving pre-service teacher training, in-service professional development, training and ongoing support for teachers – something I have long believed is fundamental to strengthening the quality of education that students receive.

The best thing we can do to help our kids succeed in math is to invest more in the success of their teachers. I am glad to say that this Congress has taken some important first steps in this direction. Last year we enacted the America COMPETES Act, which improves teacher education in math, science, and other high-need fields.

We also provided up-front tuition assistance of \$4,000 per year for outstanding undergraduate students who commit to teaching in math or another high-need subject in a high-need school.

But as this report reminds us, it will take comprehensive, systemic reforms to truly improve math education in this country.

This administration deserves credit for convening this panel. However, at a time when we need strong leadership in bolstering the fields of math and science, it is extremely disappointing that this administration recently decided to withdraw the U.S. from participation in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, an international exam given to high school students who take advanced placement math and physics courses.

We will not be able to make the well-informed policy decisions needed to keep our nation on the cutting edge of innovation and discovery if we can't measure the performance of our students against the performance of students in other countries. I hope that the administration will reconsider this misguided decision.

Nothing is more important for the future of our country than building a world-class education system that will give every child the opportunity to succeed.

I hope that the National Math Panel's report serves not just as a wake-up call, but as a catalyst for the significant changes needed to help reach that goal.

I want to thank our panel of expert witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to hearing more about their experiences and recommendations for how we can strengthen math education.

Thank you.

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