

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “Teacher Equity: Effective Teachers for All Children”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “Teacher Equity: Effective Teachers for All Children.”*

We’re here today to take a look at a critically important issue: how to fulfill the promise of providing every child in this country with an excellent teacher.

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of innovators and engineers, entrepreneurs and scientists.

We can all think of a teacher who made a difference in our lives.

And we are grateful to all teachers for their dedication and hard work.

In a major speech last week, Secretary Duncan called education the civil rights issue of our generation.

He’s absolutely right. At their core, our nation’s education laws are civil rights laws. They are based on the belief that we must give every child in the U.S., regardless of their background or family income, an equal shot at a world class education.

It is unacceptable that poor and minority students in schools that are struggling academically are twice as likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers as their peers in more affluent schools.

The very students who could benefit the most from the very best teachers are the least likely to get them.

This is why No Child Left Behind requires states and school districts to address inequities in the distribution of teachers and to ensure that low-income and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or – perhaps most importantly – out-of-field teachers.

But under the Bush administration, this requirement was not adequately enforced.

In 2006, a report by the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights showed that 41 states did not comply with the teacher equity provisions.

While we wait for equity, there are devastating consequences for far too many children. Take, for example, what happens in many math classes in schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students.

Nearly half of the math classes in high-poverty high schools are taught by teachers who did not major in math or a math-related field.

In high-poverty middle schools, only three out of every ten math classes are taught by a teacher who had a college major or minor in math.

We have to do more to address this problem now.

That's why, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we challenged states and school districts to do more in two ways.

First, in order to receive their share of the \$40 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, states are required to report how they're making progress on four key areas of reform, including improving teacher effectiveness and ensuring that excellent teachers are getting placed in classrooms that need them most.

Second, the Race to the Top Fund will reward states that make progress in this area. This sends an important signal that it is no longer acceptable for poor and minority students not to get their fair share of outstanding teachers.

It is in the best interests of our students, schools and our economic future to start treating teachers like the professionals that they are, with the respect they deserve.

This means treating them the same way we treat other professions.

We have to expect the best from them, and give them the resources and professional development opportunities they need to grow.

We have to do a better job at recruiting, retaining and rewarding excellent teachers.

We have to ensure states are distributing these effective teachers into the classrooms that need them the most.

Now all of this is going to require a seismic shift in the way we think about teachers, the way we talk about teachers, and the way we treat teachers.

We have to include teachers as part of the discussion and we have to acknowledge when we fail to distinguish a good teacher from an okay teacher, or a great teacher from an ineffective teacher, we ultimately fail our students.

This is why we are here today, for the first of several hearings we plan to hold on this issue.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can address the inequities in teacher talent in this country. And I'm pleased to know so many of our witnesses have first-hand teaching experience.

Thank you for being here.

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