
EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On
“Strengthening America’s Competitiveness through High School
Reform”**

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 “Strengthening America’s Competitiveness through High School Reform.”*

Today we’re here to take a closer look at how improving graduation rates in our nation’s high schools can help strengthen our competitiveness.

We’re also going to take a look at what is working to help turn around the so-called “dropout factories” and their feeder schools.

Some may think twice about using the word “crisis” to define what’s happening in our high schools. But the truth is, we aren’t just facing a crisis - the house is on fire.

The new McKinsey report says the achievement gaps in this country are the same as having, and I quote “a permanent national recession.”

Today only 70 percent of students graduate with a regular high school diploma. Of these students, fewer than half graduate fully prepared for college-level work or success in the workforce.

Nearly one in five U.S. men between the ages of 16 and 24, nearly 19 percent, have dropped out.

About 10 percent of high schools produce close to half of our students who drop out. In these 2,000 high schools –so-called “dropout factories” – about as many students drop out as graduate.

These dropout factories disproportionately impact minority students, producing 69 percent of all African-American and 63 percent of all Hispanic students who drop out.

Nationally, only about 55 percent of African-American students and 52 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time, compared to 78 percent of white students. It is a

national tragedy that if you're a minority student in this country, you have a one-in-three chance of attending a dropout factory.

We used to be a world leader in high school graduation rates. Now we've fallen to 18th out of 24 among industrialized nations.

Studies also show the longer our students stay in school, the longer they fall behind their international peers.

Last month's NAEP study of long term trends showed 17 year old students' reading and math scores have not improved since 1970's.

This is astonishing.

We cannot afford to continue this way, not for our students, our economy or our future competitiveness.

A high school dropout earns an average of \$260,000 less than a high school graduate and \$1 million less than a college graduate over a lifetime.

Each class of high school dropouts cost the U.S. economy \$309 billion in lost wages over the students' lifetime.

In fact, the McKinsey report shows the international achievement gap poses a greater economic threat to our country than the current downturn.

It found that if the U.S. had closed the international achievement gap between 1983 and 1998, our 2008 GDP would have been between \$1 and \$2 trillion higher – that's about 9 to 16 percent of our GDP.

We should be producing the most qualified and talented workforce possible. Instead businesses say high school graduates are not ready for the workplace, and colleges say high school graduates are not ready for the rigors of college.

It's become increasingly clear that addressing this dropout crisis is one of the most important things we can do to turn our economy around for good.

In its current form, No Child Left Behind doesn't do enough to turn around low-performing middle and high schools and improve our graduation rates, partly because we do not yet have common state standards.

Each state uses different data and calculations to determine their graduation rates. A sampling of dropout factories found that almost 40 percent had made Adequate Yearly Progress under NCLB.

It is safe to say that if at least 40 percent of a school's students aren't graduating – that school is not succeeding.

We need to hold schools responsible for their graduation rates so they can improve student performance.

We also need to discourage schools from pushing out students who aren't making the grade and ask schools to keep their doors open to students who leave and want to return.

Earlier this year, President Obama called on Congress to take action. He said the dropout crisis in this country is bigger than any single person who chooses not to finish high school.

I couldn't agree more – this crisis is a drain on our economy, it's an embarrassment to our schools, and it has to change.

The President and Secretary Duncan know that we need to give schools the means to support and encourage students to stay in school. We can no longer endorse a system of acceptable losses.

I hope today's hearing will be a good first step as we work with the Obama administration to finally address this crisis.

Lastly, I would like to thank many of my committee colleagues for their outstanding leadership on this issue, including Chairman Kildee's Fast Track to College Act, Rep. Grijalva's Success in the Middle Act, Rep. Hinojosa's Graduation Promise Act, and Rep. Scott's GRADUATES Act.

Clearly there is great interest in moving forward with legislation to address this urgent problem.

I look forward to hearing from witnesses about what we can do to dramatically improve the educational opportunities we are providing to all high school students in this country.

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