

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “Supporting America’s Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders”

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 “Supporting America’s Educators: The Importance of Quality Teachers and Leaders”.*

Good afternoon.

Today is National Teacher Day – a day when we should all be honoring the amazing teachers in this country. But nationwide, almost a quarter million educators are set to lose their jobs in the upcoming school year.

In my district, close to one thousand education jobs are set to be eliminated.

We won’t be able to educate our way to a better economy, as Secretary Duncan says, if our students are losing a year of learning in the wake of these layoffs.

I’ve introduced the Local Jobs for America Act to help save education jobs. The bill would invest \$23 billion to support education jobs, like teachers, janitors, cafeteria workers, guidance counselors and principals.

I hope my colleagues on both sides of this committee room will support this bill because the most important support we can give a teacher, is to help them keep their jobs.

Today we’ll explore the urgent issue of how we can best support teachers and leaders in schools and, by doing so, support students and our economic recovery.

Of all the factors involved in giving children a good education, none is more important than their teacher. School leaders are a close second.

Yet, despite their unique role in helping shape our future generations, we still don’t treat teachers as true professionals.

We all know stories of incredible teachers who are having success in closing the achievement gap, keeping kids in school and helping students excel.

But 14 percent of teachers stop teaching after their first year. More than a third leave teaching after three years. Almost 50 percent leave within five years.

It is clear we have to do a much better job at recruiting, retaining and rewarding excellent teachers and leaders.

We have to do a much better job of making the classroom reflect a modern workplace.

And we have to do a much better job at ensuring that teacher talent is distributed equally in a district, so that the students who need the best teachers have access to them.

In almost every school district across the country, the schools and students most in need of funding often get the fewest resources.

Children in the highest poverty and high minority schools are assigned to teachers without strong backgrounds in their subject matter at twice the rate as children in wealthier schools.

This leaves us with an embarrassing and persistent achievement gap in this country – and poses a real threat to our economic recovery and our global competitiveness.

Too often in this country, poor and minority students are on a trajectory toward failure without access to great schools or great teachers.

On average, African American and Hispanic students reach fourth grade three years behind their white peers.

Only slightly more than half of Hispanic and African American students graduate high school on time compared with over three quarters of white students.

High school dropouts can have an enormous economic impact on our nation as a whole.

In fact, one high school dropout will cost the nation more than a quarter of a million dollars in lost wages, taxes and productivity over the course of his or her lifetime.

Altogether, dropouts from the class of 2008 will cost this country nearly \$319 billion wages over their lifetimes.

But research shows that given the right resources, we can change this fortune for these students.

In Los Angeles, for example, one study shows that if the district were to replace the least effective teachers with the most effective teachers for four years, it would completely close the achievement gap.

That's stunning.

Excellent teachers are the key to success in our schools.

But we won't be able to solve the many challenges facing our schools unless we change the way we treat teachers, talk about teachers and think about teachers.

To help attract and retain bright teaching talent, we'll need to make the teaching workplace look more like what other young workers expect: To be treated like professionals, with the respect, recognition, and resources needed to do their jobs.

Other countries have already recognized this.

In Finland for example, teachers are recruited from the top 10 percent of their graduating class. Teaching is the most sought out profession for the highest achieving college students – more so than law or medicine.

But none of this can happen on its own. It has to be part of a comprehensive and seismic shift in our discussions about the future of our education system in this country. And we need our teachers to help shape this discussion.

We've already made great progress with some of these reforms in the Recovery Act and Race to the Top. States and districts are now being challenged to make progress in turning around the lowest-performing schools, implementing data systems linked with better assessments and fairly and equally distributing teacher talent.

These reforms will only be successful if they are done *with* teachers – not *to* teachers. At every step of the way, teachers must have a seat at the table.

We need to reward teachers whose students are making significant gains in the classroom. We need to provide teachers with the means and the time to help share their skills with less experienced teachers. And we need to encourage a team effort in schools.

We also need to be smarter about where principals are placed in a district. Research shows that a leader's skill set should match the needs of a school, especially as it relates to turning around schools.

If we're serious about closing the achievement gap, about ending the high school dropout crisis, about regaining our global competitiveness in the world, then we have to be serious about supporting teachers.

I look forward to hearing from witnesses today about how we can create a modern teaching workplace that will help every teacher and every student succeed. Thank you for being here today.

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