

**Questions for Secretary Arne Duncan,
Submitted by Committee Republicans
for the March 17, 2010 hearing record of the Full Committee hearing on
“The Obama Administration’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act
Reauthorization Blueprint.”**

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

1. Implementing standards-based education was a key element of NCLB, the premise of which is continued in your blueprint. I believe we need benchmarks against which to measure students’ progress and their future success. Yet, I think we can all agree that having high standards does not alone guarantee high achievement. What do college and career ready standards mean under your proposal? How do they differ from the current state standards? How does your proposal ensure that students will achieve these standards? What has been left out of the discussion is curriculum. What role does curriculum play in ensuring that students achieve?
2. Your proposal puts significant emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of teachers. A recent survey conducted by the Gates Foundation reveals that teachers agree that students are leaving high school unprepared for college and careers. I find this unacceptable. We entrust our children to teachers to help prepare them for their futures. If teachers were in the private sector, they would be fired for failing to perform. Yet, many believe that nothing can be done. A group of superintendents in my district recently stated, “Our hands are tied in dealing with mediocre teachers – the unions have become so strong and so much a voice in the state and local governing [sic] there is no ability to fire or release mediocre teachers. Until the state or federal government steps in and helps districts deal with this issue, we will have a difficult time reaching the accountability models proposed.” What elements in your proposal will eliminate these barriers and create incentives to encourage teachers to be more effective in the classroom?
3. One of the most overlooked accomplishments of NCLB is the progress made for disabled students. Yet, your proposal makes only passing reference to special needs students. How does your proposal protect and further these students’ successes?

Congressman Bill Cassidy

1. My Congressional district includes a number of small elementary and secondary school districts that receive fewer resources under the Title I program, on a per student basis, than larger school districts located in more populated areas, because Title I funding allocation formulas tend to favor large school districts. Smaller schools have fewer students to spread their fixed Administrative costs for things, such as computer systems. Therefore, it seems logical to say that smaller school districts should receive more per student, not less. If it is true that small districts have a higher administrative cost per student, then why do they receive less money than large districts? Will you consider

reworking the Title I formulas to address this issue? This will ensure that federal dollars are fairly allocated to students no matter what size community in which they live.

2. No Child Left Behind allows parents to have options to transfer their children out of poor performing schools and into higher-performing schools in the area, or receive supplemental educational services (SES) in the community, such as tutoring, after-school programs, or remedial classes. As an advocate of parental choice, I want to ensure that parents still have the right to move their child out of a failing school or receive student support services. During the March 3 Full Committee hearing, you stated, “I am not at all in opposition to supplemental services. In fact, you will be hard pressed to find a bigger advocate for tutoring and more time than me.” But the Administration’s blueprint eliminates the requirement that school districts provide parents with public school choice and SES, choosing to focus its efforts on turning around low-performing schools. Why did the Administration eliminate these parental options? What options will parents have to remove their kids from low-performing schools or to receive extra academic help if a school turnaround model takes 4 or 5 years to implement?
3. You define “Challenge” schools as being the lowest-performing 5% of schools in a state, and require them to implement one of four turnaround models: a Transformation, a Turn-Around, a Restart, or a School Closure. In the first three types, teacher tenure will surely be a significant challenge. Will the Department of Education recommend how states and school districts should navigate this challenge and how states may grant principals more control over removing ineffective teachers?
4. The blueprint requires states to implement assessment systems to adequately measure student growth. Will the Department provide grants or funding for states to establish these data systems to collect and publicize growth in English, math, science, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates?