

U.S. Rep. George Miller
Senior Democrat on the Education and the Workforce Committee
"Education Regulations: Weighing the Burden on Schools and Students"
Tuesday, March 1, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing.

Today we'll hear about the role of the federal government in education.

There is a consensus across both parties in Congress, the President and Secretary Duncan, that the federal role in education needs to be re-evaluated.

And I think we all agree that any federal involvement in our schools needs to work in the best interest of our students.

I want to start with a story about one of the best days in my career which was right after school performance was reported in my district, as required by No Child Left Behind.

These requirements helped give parents insight into what was happening in their children's schools. After a newspaper first published the AYP results about my district, parents called for a community meeting, not because they were upset about the scores, instead because they were infuriated they hadn't known this information before.

That moment highlighted what we got right in No Child Left Behind – real information for parents about the state of their schools.

Before we passed NCLB ten years ago, accountability in education was nearly non-existent and, worse, student performance was masked.

Prior to the law, only 11 states had access to data that showed gender or ethnicity.

Only 6 states had data about the achievement of poor students.

Only 7 states were able to see data about the achievement of students based on their English proficiency.

These students were invisible. They were struggling in classrooms across the country, and nobody knew. So nobody did anything to fix it.

We passed No Child Left Behind to tackle this harsh reality, and we meant what the title said.

No longer would it be okay to let a child fall behind because we didn't know how they were doing in school.

Schools had to be accountable for ALL their students.

Today, parents, non-profits and charter schools are all responding to students' needs demonstrated by this newly found data.

The law implemented a system of reporting and accountability to ensure that all students were being held to the same high standards and to compare students' achievement across schools, districts and states.

These new requirements allowed us to move the system forward.

They allowed us to have these conversations today about how to re-evaluate the federal role without losing sight of what we got right for students, parents and communities in NCLB.

While we have learned what we got right, we also have learned a lot about what we got wrong.

We learned there is a lot more we need to do to better support states and districts to improve the system, and most importantly, improve outcomes for students.

There has to be more coherence in the system – that means setting strong goals, maintaining strong and meaningful accountability and giving states and districts the support and flexibility to reach those goals and meet the needs of students.

We need to fund programs in a way that allows districts to maximize funding and meet the unique needs of their students and community.

We also need to recognize the critical role of data to guide programs and measure performance.

Strong use of data is what allows the federal government to get out of the way while maintaining the integrity of programs.

It lets teachers, parents, administrators and the community take responsibility for the design and accountability for outcomes in a performance based system.

Similar principles apply to how we approach regulation and accountability in the higher education arena, where we have a duty to protect the integrity of billions of dollars in federal taxpayer dollars.

We also know, however, that the outcomes we ask for drive practice. We need to be mindful that those outcomes are supporting the goals and accountability systems we set.

Let's remember, too, that as we have all of these conversations and question what is right and what is burdensome in the system, that we always first ask ourselves what is in the best interest of students.

Without that framework, we have lost sight of our true purpose.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what's happening in school districts and institutions of higher education and what we can do to ensure our students succeed.

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