

Strengthening No Child Left Behind -- June 2007

The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is approaching, and it is important to improve the current law. The House Committee on Education and Labor has held over 17 hearings, just this year, on a number of issues within NCLB, including funding, growth models, improving student achievements, closing the achievement gap, and graduation rates among others.

As an author of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and as the Senior Republican Member of the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, I believe it is vital to listen to and speak with those who are directly affected by this legislation to know how to improve the law and also meet the goal of proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year.

Recently, I hosted a roundtable discussion with Delaware educators and parents from each county to hear their observations of the current law, both the challenges and successes, as well as suggestions for how NCLB can better benefit teachers, parents, and students. The discussion we had in Delaware reflects how relevant NCLB continues to be nationwide. In my opinion, this is one of the benefits of the law - the fact that there is a solid national dialogue about our nation's students.

At the roundtable, a number of issues were raised by the teachers and parents striving to give their students the tools they need to succeed in the classroom. An area of great interest was the integration of growth models into the reauthorized legislation. Other issues discussed by educators and parents were integrating subject matter to improve student achievement, preventing dropouts and improving graduation rates, improving measures of progress, and federal funding for No Child Left Behind.

NCLB is working and funding continues to increase. Overall, funding for NCLB has increased greatly over the last five years. Last year, states and local school districts received \$23.3 billion in federal funds to help implement NCLB, a one-third increase in federal elementary and secondary education funding since President Bush signed NCLB into law. In Delaware, education funding has increased by more than 68% since the inception of the law in 2001.

In Delaware, the Achievement Gap Action Group's 2006 report showed consistent improvement in

closing reading achievement gaps in elementary, middle, and vocational-technical schools. The report also showed significant success in closing the achievement gap in special education.

On a national level, the achievement gap is closing in both reading and math, with scores narrowing by 8 points in math and 9 points in reading. Moreover, fourth-grade reading and math scores have reached an all-time high.

This is promising data and Congress should remain focused on the reason we are holding hearings and discussions on NCLB legislation - the students of today and tomorrow. It is my hope that we can take the information we already know along with the feedback from those who work most closely with our nation's students to build upon this bipartisan law through the reauthorization process.