

Educating our Children to Succeed in the Global Economy

Testimony to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

Field Hearing on the ESEA Reauthorization and STEM Education

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I would like to focus my comments today on two areas: First, based on my experience, what would be the single most important change that congress could make as a part of the reauthorization, and second, what innovative programs or strategies developed locally that could scale up and be integrated into ESEA and benefit students across the country.

The facts are compelling. Every 26 seconds, another student drops out of school. We know that a third of our students drop out each year, a third graduate unprepared for college, and another third graduate prepared for college. We also recognize that poor children and children of color disproportionately represent the third that's dropping out, which contributes to the disparities in the criminal justice system, economic development, health care, and ultimately mortality.

The nation seems to be paralyzed on what to do. So we spend billions of dollars annually to study, research, and theorize about what works. We talk about having great teachers and leaders in every school. We shout about equity and opportunity for all students. We insist that "raising the bar" and "rewarding excellence" will make a difference, and then we look for innovation and continuous improvement as the solution.

My frontline experience suggests to me that all of these are necessary depending on what outcome you want, and how soon you expect to achieve it. But nothing has occurred in the last few decades that lead us to believe that moving the needle on any of the above strategies comes soon enough. During my talk thus far, we lost another five students. So what should we change within ESEA? We should change the relationship between the school and the community. We need a paradigm shift in public education that recognizes the urgency and need for the public/private partnership that educates the whole child and supports the whole family. We must recognize that in order for public education systems to be successful, they must include family, community, and school life. In addition, how often can we actually point to someone who takes full responsibility for the success or failure of a student? Is it the parent, the teacher, the principal, the coach? Who is it? Most often, you'll find all of these individuals pointing fingers at each other. So ESEA must put a provision into the law, with accompanying

resources, that strongly encourage low performing schools to partner with proven community based organizations in a full partnership that provides the safety net that all kids need, but many fail to get. Believe me when I tell you that those of us on the front lines see, feel, smell, and taste the pain. And Senators, you would not like the way it taste.

The answer does not need to be studied anymore. This, in simple terms, is about the safety net, options, and opportunities that kids either have or don't have. All kids stumble, and all kids fall. The question is, what support systems are there to help that kid get up? Either you have a support system in place, or you don't. I contend that most low achieving school students don't have this in place, and therefore, never get up. The key is to put that in place for every kid, and then be accountable for the success or failure of that kid. Let me give you an example: It was highlighted in the movie "Waiting for Superman", and Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan uses the point as well that 50% of the drop outs in America are coming from basically 2000 low-performing high schools. I believe that we should focus on not only those who dropped out of those schools, but also those who did not. We should identify the reason why 50% of these kids actually made it in a low-performing school. I guarantee you it was because a safety net – a strong parent, grandparent, teacher, coach or a community that would not let that kid fail; In my opinion, the best way to achieve this is through a MSO, or multi-service organization. The most notable of these today would be Harlem Children's Zone. It's not a silver bullet, but it's a successful model working with children and families that also partners with schools to get the desired outcome.

The innovation in Portland Public Schools is called Self Enhancement, Inc. Like Harlem Children's Zone, Self Enhancement, Inc is a multi-service organization able to serve kids and families and bring an authenticity to a school/community partnership for lasting results. Self Enhancement, Inc. as a community based program partners with the local school district, individual schools, teachers, and the teacher's union to provide the complete safety net for every kid that enrolls in the program. It's a program that works 24/7, 365 days a year; a program that takes full responsibility for the success or failure of each kid. It's a 30 year-old program that touches over 3,000 kids per year, graduates 98% of the students enrolled in the program, and sends 85% to college. It's a program that produces "Positive Contributing Citizens" – meaning that every kid in the program who graduates from high school will complete a minimum of two years of college, vocational training, or work at a family wage job. We have proven that if we can provide each child with discipline, direction, support, and unconditional love, and combine this with what most schools provide every day; this will equal a Positive Contributing Citizen.

So, in concluding, I first believe we must mandate that low achieving schools partner with proven community based organizations that represent the school's community in order to

provide the complete safety net of family, community, and school life. Secondly, we must look at identifying and scaling up authentic community based organizations and multi-service organizations like Self Enhancement, Inc. that have a track record in the school communities in need, but that also have the ability to partner with districts, schools, teachers, and union to better provide the discipline, direction, support and unconditional love necessary for maximum success.

You all have an awesome job to do. Somehow, I believe that your answers lie deeply rooted in individuals who claim the streets and communities which these kids come from. We need a mechanism that allows them to speak, participate, and support those they serve daily.

Thank you.