

## Testimony as Prepared for Delivery by Dr. Miguel Cardona

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, distinguished Members of the Committee:

It's an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Secretary of Education.

Soy Miguel Cardona, husband of Marissa and proud father of Miguel Jr. and Celine. Son of Hector and Sarah Cardona, and brother to Hector Jr and Marisol. Their role in my life has shaped my preparation for today's hearing as much as any degree or professional experience I've had. While the pandemic prevented all of them joining me in the room today, I carry their presence in every word I speak.

We're here today in the midst of one of the most challenging school years in American history. For far too many of our students, this year has piled on crisis after crisis. As a parent, and as an educator, I have lived those challenges alongside millions of families.

The burden on educators and families has been tremendous: taking a toll on the mental health and well-being of our children, parents, educators, and staff. Fewer students started college this fall, and those declines were most striking at community colleges – institutions that have long served as entry points to higher education and economic mobility for so many.

Our nation's education challenges didn't begin with the pandemic, but it has exacerbated inequities in our educational system.

These inequities will endure, and prevent the potential of this great country, unless tackled head-on. And so it is our responsibility, and it would be my greatest privilege, if confirmed, to forge opportunity out of this crisis.

As Americans, we have always risen to the challenge to solve problems and create a brighter future for our children. This was true for my family, when my grandparents Avelino, Maria, and Germana travelled from Aguada, Puerto Rico to find new opportunities in the Silver City of Meriden, Connecticut.

It was true when my parents, Hector and Sara Cardona, taught me to dream big and aim high. Their own hard work empowered me to expand my horizons and become the first in my family to graduate college. While we didn't always have a lot of material possessions, I was born rich. This perseverance turned into gratitude when I became a teacher, principal, and district leader in the very same community that gave me so much as a child.

For me, education opened doors. That is the power and promise of America — but it is not a promise kept for every student.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I will work tirelessly to make sure our education system is a door to opportunity, a great equalizer, for every American:

- We will work to reopen schools safely, so that students can return to classrooms.
- We will remove silos in education, sharing our breakthroughs and successes throughout our country, and cultivating schools and colleges as places of innovation.
- We will make sure that when students graduate from high school, they have college and career pathways to good futures.
- We will make college accessible to every student who seeks opportunity through education, including strengthening this nation's best-kept secret: community colleges.
- We will ensure the dedicated teachers, paraeducators, principals, superintendents, and committed higher education faculty are recognized for their contribution to this country.
- We will boldly address educational inequities head-on and hold ourselves accountable for providing equitable outcomes from pre-kindergarten through college and into adult learning.

Investing in public education changes lives and saves lives. I've seen it. I've lived it. And I know that our challenges ahead are problems we can overcome together.

There is a saying in Spanish: **En la unión está la fuerza. In unity there is strength.**

We gain strength from joining together.

Like our schools, we gain strength when we create a culture of community.

That is why, if confirmed, I look forward to sitting at the table with the vast, diverse community of people who have a stake in education — students, parents, teachers, caregivers, advocates, and state, local, tribal leaders and the dedicated career staff at the department. Their voices matter!

I can think of no higher calling than working to build a better, more equal future for the next generation. I have the same dreams for all students in our country as I do for my own Angelito and Celine.

I am grateful for the chance to take on this responsibility. I'm grateful for your time today. I'm grateful to President Biden and Vice President Harris for placing their trust in me.

In closing: As your nominee, I am first a husband of a family school liaison, a father of two public high schoolers, an educator, and most importantly, a student advocate.

If confirmed, I look forward to getting to work on behalf of **all** students — and working with you to build a future of promise and opportunity for the next generation.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.