

CHINA'S IMPACT ON THE U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM  
CHAIRMAN ROB PORTMAN  
OPENING STATEMENT

February 28, 2019

The first Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations hearing of the 116th Congress will come to order [**gavel**].

Last night, Sen. Carper and I released a report detailing China's surprising impact on the U.S. education system. The report is the result of an eight-month investigation that focused on China's Confucius Institutes.

Based on our findings, we are here to talk about **TRANSPARENCY** and **RECIPROCITY**.

**TRANSPARENCY** in how American colleges and universities manage Confucius Institutes—which are controlled, funded, and mostly staffed by the Chinese government and aim to promote Chinese language and culture – and Chinese interests on U.S. campuses.

Lack of **RECIPROCITY** in how China does not permit U.S. State Department programming in China. Our report details how China—known for its one-sided dealings in trade and tariffs—uses similar tactics in its unfair treatment of U.S. schools and State Department efforts in China.

Let me be clear, I support cultural exchange with China and the international community more broadly. I am for engagement – but there must be reciprocity and appropriate engagement, without the Chinese government determining what is said and done on U.S. campuses. And the law must be followed – this is why transparency is so important.

**U.S. officials have expressed concerns about China's influence through its Confucius Institutes.** Recently, the FBI's Assistant Director for the Counterintelligence Division testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee that Confucius Institutes “are **not strictly a cultural institute**” and “that they're **ultimately beholden to the Chinese government.**”

And the State Department has labeled Confucius Institutes, “China's most prominent soft power platform.”

**Higher education groups have also expressed concern:** The American Council of Education, National Association of Scholars, and the American Association of University Professors have all recommended that U.S. schools fundamentally change how they manage Confucius Institutes—or consider shutting them down.

We know that Confucius Institutes exist as just one part of China’s broader, long-term strategy, but China has invested significantly in them—giving more than \$158 million to U.S. schools since 2006. Over 12 years – not one year as I said yesterday.

And China has also opened more than **500** Confucius Classrooms at U.S. K–12 schools. Expanding the Confucius Classroom program is a priority. A document obtained by the Subcommittee details a plan to expand Confucius Classrooms by seeking the “top-down policy support from the state government, legislative and educational institutions, with a particular emphasis on access to the support from school district superintendents and principals.”

Over the last eight months, we interviewed U.S. school officials, teachers, and Confucius Institute instructors. We also reviewed tens of thousands of pages of contracts, emails, financial records, and other internal documents obtained from more than 100 U.S. schools with either active or closed Confucius Institutes.

Since our investigation started, more than 10 U.S. schools announced they would be discontinuing their Confucius Institutes.

**We found that Chinese funding for Confucius Institutes comes with strings attached – strings that can compromise academic freedom:**

- The Chinese government vets and approves all Chinese directors and teachers, events, research proposals, and speakers at U.S. Confucius Institutes.
- Chinese teachers at U.S. Confucius Institutes sign contracts with the Chinese government pledging they will follow Chinese law and “**conscientiously safeguard China’s national interests.**”
- Some schools contractually agree that both Chinese and U.S. laws will apply at the Confucius Institute on the U.S. school’s campus. Think about that for a second: American universities are agreeing to comply with Chinese law on their own campuses.

**This application of Chinese law at U.S. schools results in exporting China’s censorship of political debate and prevent discussion of politically sensitive topics.**

As such, numerous U.S. school officials told the Subcommittee that Confucius Institutes *were not the place* to discuss topics like the independence of Taiwan or the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Put simply, as one U.S. school administrator told us: **“You know what you’re getting when something is funded by the Chinese government.”**

Investigators from the Government Accountability Office also spoke with U.S. school officials, who acknowledged that hosting a Confucius Institute could limit events or activities critical of China—not just at the Confucius Institute, but also elsewhere on campus.

**In response to the growing popularity of Confucius Institutes, the U.S. State Department initiated its own public diplomacy program in China. The Chinese government effectively shut it down.**

Since 2010, the State Department has provided **\$5.1 million** in grant funding for 29 “American Cultural Centers” or “ACCs” in China. Through the program, a U.S. school would partner with a Chinese school to set up a cultural center, which would enable Chinese students to better understand U.S. culture.

The Chinese government stifled the program from the start.

- Seven of the 29 ACCs never even opened.
- The ACCs that did open found they needed permission from their Chinese partner schools—sometimes including local Chinese Communist Party officials—to hold events.
- Eventually, State stopped funding the program altogether.

**While the State Department is mostly known for its overseas diplomacy efforts, it also has oversight responsibilities here in the United States.**

The State Department conducts Field Site Reviews to ensure that foreign nationals who come to the United States on Exchange Visitor Program visas are here for their stated reason.

While there are roughly 100 Confucius Institutes in the United States, the State Department has conducted Field Site Reviews at only **TWO**. And the State Department found serious problems at both schools:

- State revoked more than 30 visas for Chinese exchange visitors at Confucius Institutes who were only supposed to be working at the university that sponsored their visa, but were actually teaching in Confucius Classrooms at local K–12 schools.
- State discovered evidence of “fraudulent paperwork and coaching” that was a “deliberate attempt to deceive” investigators.

Moreover, State told us that it does not collect visa information specifically related to Confucius Institutes. So they do not know how many Confucius Institute teachers are here or where they are.

**Our investigation also identified failures at the Department of Education that have contributed to a lack of transparency and oversight of schools that take money from foreign governments.**

If a U.S. school receives more than \$250,000 from a single foreign source in one year, it is required to report that data to the Department of Education, which in turn publishes it.

Our investigation found that **nearly 70 percent of schools** that should have reported receiving funds for a Confucius Institute from China did not.

When a school fails to report a foreign gift, the Department of Justice can force a school to comply, but only **at the request of the Secretary of Education.**” The Department of Education has **never** referred this type of case to them. Not once.

The Department of Education has not issued any guidance on foreign gift reporting to U.S. schools since October 2004—over 14 years ago—and the same year that China opened its first U.S. Confucius Institute. It’s time for new guidance.

**Our investigation found that schools in the United States—from kindergarten to college—have provided a level of access to the Chinese government that the Chinese government refuses to provide to the United States.**

**This brings us back to our two key points: TRANSPARENCY and RECIPROCITY.**

Absent full **transparency** regarding how Confucius Institutes operate and full **reciprocity** for U.S. cultural outreach efforts on Chinese campuses, Confucius Institutes should not continue in the United States.

With that, I turn to Senator Carper for his opening statement.