

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper

“A Review of the Department of Education and Student Achievement”

September 30, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this important hearing today.

As a parent and as someone who has had the honor to serve Delawareans at both the federal and state level, few issues have been more important to me—and continue to be more important to me—than raising student achievement and improving the quality of our nation’s schools. Similarly, there are few issues more important to the future of the United States than equipping our nation’s students with knowledge and skills they need to compete successfully with the rest of the world.

If we're serious about winning the competition for jobs in a global economy in the 21st Century, we need to start by out-educating other nations. Today’s hearing offers us a gut check, particularly when it comes to higher education.

We no longer lead the world in producing the highest percentage of college graduates. Total outstanding student loan debt has surpassed \$1.3 trillion. And the ever-increasing costs of higher education have increasingly forced low- and middle-income students to take on oftentimes unnecessary amounts of debt just to stay competitive with their peers, both domestically and abroad.

In my mind, we need urgent change. I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses about what they think that change should look like.

I mentioned out-educating other nations. That isn’t limited to college education, though that’s a big part of it. We also need to look at improving education every step along the way, beginning at the earliest years through high school and college graduation. We could benefit from taking a page out of the book I learned as head of the National Governor’s Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices. What my colleagues and I from around the country tried to do on education policy and any number of issues was to figure out what works and replicate proven models of success in our states. In many cases, we already know what works. I’ll mention just a few examples.

High-quality early childhood education works. Rigorous academic standards raise expectations. Great teachers and strong school leaders improve educational outcomes of entire buildings. An engaged and compassionate mentor can change a child’s life. And when we encourage the use of innovative practices, whether that involves harnessing new technology or replicating what’s working at a high-performing charter school, we improve on the status quo.

I want to close by saying that, if we’re serious about winning the competition to out-educate the rest of the world, we must remember that this burden does not fall to the Department of Education alone. It is a shared responsibility. It is a shared responsibility among federal, state, and local governments, schools, districts, teachers, principals, employers, and parents.

The purpose of today's hearing is to focus on the federal role, but I would encourage each of the witnesses to bring our attention to shared responsibility as well.

Again, thank you to Chairman Johnson and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

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