

Key Remarks From ESEA Reauthorization Hearings: March–May 2010

May 4, 2010

Improving America's Secondary Schools

Selected statements of each speaker are presented to help you identify which testimony you may wish to read in its entirety.

Cassius O. Johnson

Director of Education Policy, Jobs for the Future, Boston, Massachusetts

“The continued failure of secondary school systems in the United States to dramatically improve the educational attainment of low-income young people, young people of color and those in rural America is perhaps the single most significant factor in our country’s drop from first to tenth in the world in the completion rate of postsecondary degrees by age 35. ... With the high school graduation rate basically flat for several decades, our nation cannot make the gains we need in productivity without dramatic reductions in the dropout rate and significant and steady increases in district and state graduation rates. ... The progress of the innovative frontrunner cities and states in seeding and supporting better alternatives for struggling students is impressive. But while identifying exemplars is important, creating a policy environment that promotes and expands successful secondary school options while shrinking the number of low-performing high schools is another.”

Don Deshler

Director, Center for Research on Learning, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

“My purpose is to speak about the millions of adolescents whose literacy skills are so low that they cannot make sense of their classroom texts, frequently fail to graduate from high school, and are unsuccessful in transitioning into careers or postsecondary education. ... The term ‘crisis’ is typically defined as a threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals. The term is often used to describe social challenges that our nation faces. Frequent and inappropriate use of the term can cheapen its meaning. However, when describing the ‘literacy health’ of many adolescents in our country, the term ‘crisis’ is not hyperbole; it is a very accurate characterization of the realities with which we must come to grips when we consider the fact that our schools must produce graduates capable of successfully competing, and leading, in the global arena.”

John Capozzi

Principal, Elmont Memorial High School, Elmont, New York

“Principals and school administrators must take the lead in helping teachers develop their pedagogical skills. In order for a principal to be an effective instructional leader, they must first be a master teacher. A master teacher analyzes data and differentiates instruction. A mediocre teacher simply examines data and reteaches the material. A poor teacher does not examine the data and continues on to the next topic. A master teacher develops lesson plans that are responsive to the different learners in their classroom. A mediocre teacher simply looks at the

content as the foundation of lesson planning. A poor teacher does not have the skill set to plan effectively. Principals must be well versed in pedagogy and be willing to work, hands-on with their teachers to develop schools where excellent instruction is the standard.”

Richard Harrison

Middle School Director, Denver School for Science and Technology, Denver, Colorado

“Providing all students from all backgrounds and incomes with an outstanding K–12 education and the academic preparation to go to college without remediation should be the singular focus of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As charter school leaders, we recognize that charter schools are one of many strategies to accomplish this goal. We do not believe that charter schools are the only path to take. Traditional district schools and alternative schools all have an important to role to play in dramatically improving our nation’s public secondary education. Instead of using different governance or management structures of public schools to divide and distract our efforts to educate all students, we should be encouraged that there are multiple strategies that our districts can use to ensure a great education for all students and focus on the results that each teacher, school, and district achieve for their students. This is one of many reasons why charter schools are a critical component of our education reform strategy.”

Karen Webber-N’Dour

Principal, National Academy Foundation High School, Baltimore, Maryland

“Career academies are one of the most established, prevalent, and well-researched high school reform approaches. This model is time tested—the career academy movement began 40 years ago in Philadelphia, and the National Academy Foundation has been refining its model for nearly 30 years. Today, there are estimated to be between 2,500 and 4,000 career academies across the country, serving approximately 1 million public high school students. Five hundred of these academies are part of the National Academy Foundation’s network, and they will reach 53,000 students this school year.”

Tony Habit

President, North Carolina New Schools Project, Raleigh, North Carolina

“I believe that the results being achieved by North Carolina’s innovative schools are persuasive evidence that secondary schools can be transformed into places of powerful teaching and learning where truly all students graduate ready for college and careers. For example, a recent independent study of early college in North Carolina found that these schools are succeeding in erasing the achievement gap.”