



House Committee on Education & the Workforce
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News Update

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Witnesses Advise House Education Panel: Few Parents Aware of Free Tutoring Services Available Under No Child Left Behind Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Witnesses testifying before the U.S. House Education & the Workforce Committee today underscored the need for greater parental awareness of supplemental educational services (SES) available to eligible students under the No Child Left Behind Act. This was the latest hearing in a series announced in May by the Committee's Chairman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), Senior Democrat George Miller (D-CA), and Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Mike Castle (R-DE).

"Among the most important features of No Child Left Behind is the priority it places on expanding options for parents whose children attend underperforming public schools," said McKeon. "Yet evidence continues to emerge that the SES feature is not being utilized as widely as it should be. Congress has a responsibility to take a thorough and serious look into why - and how we can change it - as we work to renew the law next year. Access to supplemental educational services is vital to the success of No Child Left Behind."

Under No Child Left Behind, students attending public schools that have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for three consecutive years have the right to take advantage of free supplemental educational services, such as private tutoring. However, reports have highlighted an apparent lack of parental awareness that these options exist, meaning eligible students do not have the chance to take advantage of these benefits under the law. Today's hearing was focused on reasons why this has occurred, as well as ways to reverse course.

Cornelia Ashby, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues at the independent Government Accountability Office detailed for the panel the findings of "No Child Left Behind Act: Education Actions Needed to Improve Implementation and Evaluation of Supplemental Educational Services," an August report published by the agency. The report pointed to the slow

progress in raising parental awareness of SES options available to their children.

"The SES participation rate increased from 12 to 19 percent of eligible students between school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005," Ashby noted. "While districts have provided written information notifying parents of SES and taken other actions to encourage participation, challenges remain, such as notifying parents in a timely and effective manner."

Morgan Brown, the U.S. Department of Education's Assistant Deputy Secretary in the Office of Innovation and Improvement, discussed Department efforts to increase awareness of the services.

"The Department is taking a two-pronged approach toward improving SES implementation across the country," Brown told the panel. "On the one hand, we are continuing and enhancing our efforts to provide high-quality technical assistance and resources to states and local school districts, and to grant states and districts flexibility in implementing the requirements of No Child Left Behind in exchange for meaningful results. On the other, we are prepared to take significant enforcement action where poor implementation of SES by states and districts requires it. In both these areas, parental awareness is a crucial ingredient."

Dr. Barbara Anderson, Vice President of Education of Knowledge Learning Corporation-School Partnerships, a provider of supplemental educational services, echoed concerns raised by Ashby and Brown, noting that parents are rarely notified in a clear, timely manner when SES options are available to their children.

"Our company's experience indicates that too many parents remain unaware of supplemental educational services and the process and procedure to gain access to services," said Anderson. "Unfortunately, in too many places, parent notification letters are full of legal terms and long complex explanations that only serve to confuse parents. All communications should be written with parents in mind, they should be 'parent friendly' and in a language they can understand."

Dr. Stephen Barr, Associate Superintendent of the Center for School Improvement at the Ohio Department of Education, discussed with the Committee what his state is doing to avoid the pitfalls described by Dr. Anderson.

"The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) developed an online supplemental educational services application to provide parents with the opportunity to review the full array of available choices," Barr stated. "The application is available year round. The standard for application review and recommendation by outside reviewers is two weeks or less. Rejected applicants may re-submit... To facilitate parent and district access to the Ohio list of approved providers, ODE posts the list on its web site. Districts and parents can see the state approved providers available to serve eligible students in their district... The listing is always up-to-date and includes the name of the providers, their qualifications, description of services delivered, group sizes and locations, hourly rates, and contact information."

Monique Dollonne, a Ventura, California mother of a child receiving supplemental educational services, touted their benefits and recommended they be made available more quickly for eligible students.

"Implementing SES properly and giving it its full force is a civil rights issue for all of our most vulnerable children," said Dollonne. "SES is giving failing children a second chance of access to success when children have been in a failing school for the fourth year. Parents would like to see an earlier implementation of SES, most parents would prefer to have SES access before being given

transferring options to a better school."

Slated to be reauthorized next year, No Child Left Behind is a comprehensive overhaul of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was enacted in 1965 and is the principal federal law affecting K-12 education. The law reflects four pillars of education reform: accountability, flexibility and local control, funding for what works, and expanded parental options.