

House Budget Committee Hearing on “First Principles of Congressional Budgeting” on July 28, 2015

Question for the Record from Rep. Chris Van Hollen

Question for Carmel Martin:

At the hearing, you highlighted the effect of the sequester on education programs, testimony which then led to a claim that although federal education spending has increased 300 percent, test scores have remained flat and that therefore more education funding is not the way to solve the problem. Because you did not have an opportunity to respond fully, I’d like to ask you to elaborate on how educational outcomes have improved in the last 35 years, and how federal education programs have helped.

Improvements in U.S. Student Achievement

American students have been making steady and significant academic achievement gains over the past two decades. Since 1995, the performance of U.S. students in fourth and eighth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress in math, reading, and science has grown the equivalent of a grade level.¹ High school graduation rates have also improved dramatically. Currently, the graduation rate is 81 percent,² the highest point in history, and is expected to climb to 90 percent by 2020.³

Over the past decade, overall achievement has continued to grow across all grades and subjects. The gains have been particularly pronounced among students of color and economically disadvantaged students. Between 2003 and 2013, the black-white achievement gap has narrowed significantly.⁴ For example, the gap has closed by over 16 percent in fourth grade reading and by 14 percent in eighth grade math⁵. Overall, reading scores among African American and Latino fourth grade students have risen twice as rapidly as those of white students since No Child Left

¹ Eric Hanushek, Paul Peterson, and Ludger Woessmann, “Is The U.S. Catching Up?” *Education Next*, Fall 2012, Vol. 22, No. 4, available at <http://educationnext.org/is-the-us-catching-up/>. The conversion of NAEP points to grade levels is widely used. See, for instance, Center for Public Education, “Score Wars: What to Make of State v. NAEP Tests,” Center for Public Education, available at <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Evaluating-performance/The-proficiency-debate-At-a-glance/Score-wars-What-to-make-of-state-v-NAEP-tests-.html>.

² U.S. Department of Education, “U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits New Record High,” (Washington, DC, 2015), available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-high-school-graduation-rate-hits-new-record-high>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, “NAEP Data Explorer,” (last accessed August 17, 2015), available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Behind was enacted.⁶ Also, the achievement growth of students eligible for free and reduced priced lunch outpaced the average growth of all students over the past decade.⁷

Although we have made progress in education, there is much more that needs to be done, particularly with respect to closing achievement gaps and ensuring that we remain globally competitive. Despite progress made in recent years, the bar for what our children need to know and be able to do to succeed in the 21st century global economy has been raised substantially. And countries around the world that have historically not invested in their nation's human capital have begun to do so. Many of these countries also do a much better job at directing resources towards the students who need them the most. In the United States, we do a poor job ensuring that our schools are equitably funded and that the students with the greatest needs have the resources needed for success.

On average, low-income school districts receive about 15 percent less per pupil than the state's most affluent districts. This amounts to an average difference of nearly \$1,500 per student.⁸ In a school of only 200 students, that difference could fund 5 teachers at \$60,000 each.

Across the country, 23 states⁹ fund their schools regressively, sending less money to poorer schools.¹⁰ On the other hand, only 7 states spend 5 percent more per pupil in their poorest school districts than in their affluent school districts.¹¹ Other research makes similar conclusions: more money is spent in richer school districts.¹²

Low-income schools are short changed at the district-level as well. In other words, poor school districts – typically already underfunded – in turn under fund their schools with the highest percentage of low-income students. In fact, more than 4.5 million low-income students attend schools eligible for federal funds but that are inequitably funded.¹³ On average, these

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Emma Brown, "In 23 States, Richer School Districts Get More Local Funding Than Poorer Districts," Washington Post, March 12, 2015, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/03/12/in-23-states-richer-school-districts-get-more-local-funding-than-poorer-districts/>.

⁹ Pennsylvania; Vermont; Missouri; Illinois; Virginia; Arizona; New York; Rhode Island; Connecticut; West Virginia; Kentucky; Maine; Maryland; Alabama; Idaho; Michigan; Wyoming; Texas; Ohio; Tennessee; Montana; Delaware; Colorado.

¹⁰ Emma Brown, "In 23 States, Richer School Districts Get More Local Funding Than Poorer Districts," Washington Post, March 12, 2015, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/03/12/in-23-states-richer-school-districts-get-more-local-funding-than-poorer-districts/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Eduardo Porter, "In Public Education, Edge Still Goes to Rich," The New York Times, November 5, 2013, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/06/business/a-rich-childs-edge-in-public-education.html?_r=0. Bruce Baker, David Sciarra, and Danielle Farrie, "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card," The Education Law Center (New Jersey, 2015), available at http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org/National_Report_Card_2015.pdf.

¹³ Robert Hanna, Max Marchitello, and Catherine Brown, "Comparable but Unequal: School Funding Disparities," Center for American Progress (Washington, DC, March 2015), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ESEAComparability-brief2.pdf>.

schools receive around \$1,200 less per student.¹⁴ Overall, there is an approximately \$8.5 billion gap between low-income schools and affluent schools within school districts across the country.¹⁵

High-quality early childhood education is critical for all students, but particularly for students from a low-income background. Despite the well-known benefits of early childhood education, national and state commitment to invest in these programs for low-income students is severely lacking. All states save for 5, enroll less low-income students than affluent ones in early childhood education programs.¹⁶ In Nevada, an affluent child is twice as likely to participate in early childhood education as low-income child.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Bruce Baker, David Sciarra, and Danielle Farrie, "Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card," The Education Law Center (New Jersey, 2015), available at http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org/National_Report_Card_2015.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid.