

# **Addressing the Invisibility, Invention, and Infrastructure Challenges**

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**Committee on Education and Labor  
U. S. House of Representatives**

***Hearing on the  
Miller-McKeon Discussion Draft of the Reauthorization of the  
Elementary and Secondary Education Act***

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## **Introduction**

I want to thank Chairman Miller, Congressman McKeon, and the other distinguished members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today on the discussion draft of the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. More importantly, thank you for providing us with a draft that puts the “secondary” back in the Elementary and Secondary Act.

There is no more critical goal than increasing the number of young people who graduate from high school and ensuring that these graduates are ready for college and careers.

My name is Adria Steinberg and I have spent the last 40 years working in and on high schools. As Associate Vice President of Jobs for the Future, my work focuses on fixing leaks in the educational pipeline, especially for low-income, African-American, and Hispanic students. Far too many of these students attend high schools where graduation is barely the norm and where academic offerings are spotty at best. And far too few of them ever reach their dream of obtaining a postsecondary credential that will lead to satisfying and family-supporting careers.

## **Addressing the Invisibility, Invention, and Infrastructure Challenges**

From our work at Jobs for the Future, we see districts and communities facing three key challenges in sealing leaks in the pipeline. We call these the 3 “T’s”: the invisibility challenge, the invention challenge, and the infrastructure challenge. The great news is that the discussion draft goes a long way toward addressing all three of these major challenges. I will talk briefly about how the draft addresses each of these challenges and make a few suggestions as to where it might be strengthened.

We have found that as school districts and communities try to be systemic and strategic in connecting or reconnecting young people to high quality pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary advancement, the first challenge that must be addressed is the *invisibility* of the graduation rate crisis. The most common methods of calculating graduation and dropout rates long masked the true magnitude of the problem. We now know that nationally 30 percent of our young people are not graduating from high school on time or at all. In low-income communities the rate drops to 40 to 50 percent.

Requiring, as the draft does, that all states use a common measure based on an adjusted cohort graduation rate and giving graduation rates equal footing with academic measures in high school accountability will ensure that all students are counted and accounted for. This will go a long way toward focusing attention on the true extent of the dropout crisis and on the large number of young people who are overage for grade and not on track to graduate from high school. We applaud the draft for that.

The second major challenge we have helped districts, communities, and states grapple with is what we call the *invention challenge*. In tackling the problem of low-performing high schools, of “dropout factory” high schools that lose almost as many students as they graduate, educators are realizing that traditional ways of doing business will not suffice.

There is a need for new models of secondary schooling that use evidence-based approaches to help young people to reengage with school, build their skills, earn a diploma, and advance to postsecondary education and careers.

The discussion draft addresses this challenge up front—by setting up the Graduation Promise Fund to support the turnaround and reinvention of low-performing high schools, and by including in this provision a set-aside to build the capacity of nonprofit entities to develop or replicate and scale up effective school models for struggling students and returning dropouts.

Policymakers and practitioners with whom we work would like nothing better than to import or adapt excellent models such as: Talent Development, KIPP, early college high school, the transfer school and Young Adult Borough Centers in New York City, YouthBuild, Performance Learning Centers, or many others, and to work with nonprofit entities on the development of more such models.

We would like to make two recommendations as to how the draft could be strengthened to have even more of an impact on invention challenges in the field.

First, we suggest that supporting the expansion and scale up of existing models and the creation of new models is so important that the set-aside should be required rather than entirely at the Secretary's discretion, and that at least 5 percent of the Graduation Promise Fund be set aside for this purpose.

Second, the invention challenges are such that it will take state/local partnerships to address them. In the current draft, the balance of power rests with the district. We would hope for language in the next draft that lays out a “both-and” strategy, where states and districts are expected to collaborate and serve as checks-and-balances to each other in efforts to turnaround high priority high schools.

The third and final challenge is the *infrastructure challenge*. Schools and districts need state policy to encourage and support them in the hard work of turnaround, reinvention, and model design. Policy, in other words, needs to keep pace with innovative programming and what is now known about what works.

The discussion draft breaks new ground by including incentives for states to design and implement policies in a comprehensive and strategic way to build infrastructure and create the operating conditions to support turnaround of high priority high schools and to allow new models to flourish. This strong support of state innovation is a refreshing addition to Part H on Dropout Prevention, and we hope it will be supported by appropriations beyond what has gone into Part H in the past. State innovation is indeed critical to dropout prevention and to the ambitious goal of significantly raising college-ready graduation rates, even in our most challenged school districts and schools.

I am honored to have had this opportunity to share my views on this groundbreaking draft and look forward to further discussion with the committee. Thank you very much.