



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Sablan (CNMI)

Subcommittees on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education and Workforce Investments

"Examining the Implementation of COVID-19 Education Funds"

Zoom

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, we are meeting to take stock of how our nation's K through 12 schools and institutions of higher education are using the Education Stabilization Fund, including in the American Rescue Plan, to weather the pandemic and keep students learning.

We are joined today by Under Secretary Kvaal ["KUH-WALL"] and Deputy Secretary Marten. We look forward to their testimony regarding the Department of Education's plans to ensure states, school districts, and institutions of higher education are using the Education Stabilization Fund as Congress intended.

Mr. Kvaal ["KUH-WALL"] and Ms. Marten, thank you for joining us.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on students of all ages. In response, Congress has provided an historic level of funding to help states and school districts reopen schools safely and get students back into the classroom.

The American Rescue Plan funding was the single largest investment in K through 12 schooling that the federal government has ever made. But we also provided support for schools and school staff and students in the CARES Act, the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act*, totaling nearly \$200 billion in total for K through 12.

This funding is a major reason why school districts around the country can reopen safely, stay open safely, and offer students additional resources to catch up, where needed. The money is also helping with the mental and social stresses that students and staff have suffered during the pandemic.

A few examples:

- In Michigan, a school district used Education Stabilization Funds to upgrade ventilation systems to improve air quality and reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- In Virginia, a school district used the money to hire more tutors to help close the students' achievement gap.
- In North Carolina, a school district was able to bring in more mental health counselors.

- In Utah, a school district is using this federal assistance to pay for after-school programs to make up for lost time in the classroom.
- And in my own district, the Northern Mariana Islands, the public school system is expanding career and technical learning through its Career Pathways Program, so students in the Marianas are ready to enter the rebounding economy.

I am sure that every Member of our two subcommittees have their own examples of how the emergency funding for schools that the Biden Administration pushed for and Congress delivered is helping our constituents.

However, because this has been such a large investment of federal resources, our two subcommittees' responsibility to keep watch over spending is even more pronounced than normal.

While there have been reported instances where districts used Education Stabilization Funds for projects outside of the intended scope, these districts seem to be the *exception, not the rule*. Moreover, as we will hear from our witnesses, the Department of Education has a clear plan of oversight of the Education Stabilization Funds.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed longstanding challenges in our education system:

- It should be the norm that schools have functioning ventilation systems, not something we only think of in a pandemic.
- It should be the norm that students have access to tutors and counselors to meet their needs.

I would like to believe that these emergency investments we have made will demonstrate that this is the scale of support we should be always providing our schools and prove, what I believe, that by investing in education we are strengthening America's economy and preparing young people for lifelong success.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue investing in America's future by investing in our students' futures.

I now turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. Owens, for the purpose of making an opening statement.