



**EVENT BRIEF**

**ED STAKEHOLDER FORUM: COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY GRADUATES**

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December 10, 2009

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On Tuesday, December 8, the Department of Education (ED) hosted its fifth, and final, in a planned series of forums that focus on the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The topic for this meeting was "College- and Career-Ready Graduates" and was moderated by Deputy Assistant Secretary for External Affairs and Outreach Massie Ritsch. Under Secretary Martha Kanter provided opening remarks and Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Thelma Melendez introduced the invited panelists. Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development Carmel Martin also participated in the forum.

**PANELISTS**

- Martha Kanter, Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Education
- Michele Cahill, Vice President for National Programs and Program Director for Urban Education, Carneige Corporation
- Kathy Havens Payne, Senior Director of Education Leadership, State Farm Insurance Company

**SUMMARY**

Massie Ritsch offered welcoming remarks and noted that this forum would be the last held by ED on the topic of the reauthorization of ESEA. He reminded the audience that the forums have been held as part of the Department's "Listening and Learning" tour seeking public input about changes to the ESEA. He also noted that by the end of the year the goal of traveling to all 50 states and holding an event in each of them led by Secretary Duncan or a senior staff member will be achieved. Ritsch also reminded attendees that December 31 is the deadline for all public comments and recommendations on necessary changes to ESEA. Lastly, a group of parents who had traveled from Philadelphia to attend the discussion were warmly welcomed by Ritsch and Under Secretary Kanter.

**Martha Kanter**

Kanter opened her remarks by stating that ED’s goal is to learn from the experiences of teachers, students, parents, school leaders, community organizations and policymakers and to incorporate lessons learned, new research and best practices into a newly reconstituted ESEA. Before hearing from the invited panelists on the topic of college- and career-readiness, Kanter wanted to share with the group where ESEA reauthorization fits in the larger context of the Administration’s overall education goals.

In order to reach the President’s overarching goal of having the best educated and most competitive workforce in the world by 2020, the U.S. must increase its college graduation rate by 50 percent to once again become the nation with the highest proportion of college graduates. Consequently, this means approximately 10 million more students need to graduate from both the two-year and four-year college and university systems. To reach that goal, according to Kanter, the U.S. must increase its high school graduation rate and close the achievement gap, not only by focusing on secondary school reform and transitions between elementary and secondary school, but by also ensuring students are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten and reading by third grade..

Kanter went on to highlight the Administration’s American Graduation Initiative, which has been incorporated into legislation introduced by House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA)—the Student Aid and Financial Reform Act (SAFRA). Passed by the House, and expected to be passed by the Senate soon, its supporters assert that this bill is a first step to helping make sure students receive a strong academic foundation that supports success in college and career. It not only would fundamentally change the way financial aid is delivered to students and families, but the bill also invests in secondary school reform, supports college access and completion and ensures quality early learning. Additionally, Kanter noted that the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is scheduled for next year as the Administration views all its reform efforts in a comprehensive manner, assuring a continuum of services from early childhood to adult education.

ED’s “cradle to career” agenda is the context within which the K-12 system and ESEA reauthorization must be viewed. Kanter said ESEA must be a vehicle to raise the bar for all students and focus on increased proficiency by implementing higher standards and better assessments; strengthen the teaching profession and increase equity through better distribution of teachers, facilitate better use of data and research and identifying best practices schools can use; and, ultimately, close the achievement gap. She noted Secretary Duncan’s goal of being “tight on goals and loose on the means” while implementing state-developed standards that truly educate students and prepare them for college and the workforce. Kanter concluded her remarks by emphasizing that ED is reaching out to Democrat and Republican lawmakers alike and that the reauthorization of ESEA will be a bipartisan issue—perhaps the only issue that can rise about the increasing congressional partisanship.

**Michele Cahill**

After being introduced by Assistant Secretary Thelma Melendez, Cahill asserted that two things needed to happen to produce more college- and career-ready graduates. First, a national movement around what it actually means to be college- and career-ready must be built. To Cahill, this means that students must graduate able to analyze a problem, imagine a solution, and then apply knowledge both as students and citizens. Second, the large number of students who are part of broken schools systems must be acknowledged, but educators and others must remain optimistic about the ability to fix them.

To accelerate the learning of under-performing students at the middle and high school levels, Cahill recommends setting aggressive graduation targets. These targets, while perhaps unrealistic, allow different parts of the system to work together on a common goal. Cahill also noted that while four-year graduation targets are necessary and preferred, five-year and even six-year targets must also be incorporated into the system for those students who need additional time. Echoing past speeches and presentations from ED representatives, Cahill also stressed the need for data to be used to inform the system, teachers, students and parents to meet both long- and short-term goals; for the identification of best practices to turn around low-performing schools; for not investing in programs that do not work; and for a determined focus on scaling up innovative practices. According to Cahill, the role of the federal government is to incentivize these necessary changes through higher standards, better assessments, more human capital and school redesign.

**Kathy Havens**

Havens stressed that business, as well as all community members, must pay attention to improving the nation's education system in order to ensure the continued growth and overall success of the country. The conversation around American education must evolve to reflect the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She noted that for business to remain successful, executives and workers must learn ever day and "education must do the same." According to Havens, how children are educated must fundamentally change, which will make adults feel "a little uncomfortable." "This may mean longer days, a longer school year and greater teacher flexibility," declared Havens, "however, we have an obligation to educate students in a safe environment with teachers who are ready to teach." Business can play a role in getting updated content knowledge into the system through activities such as service learning and internships. Havens concluded her remarks by saying that ED alone cannot focus on ESEA reauthorization, but rather "all of us have to in communities around the country because it's about our future, about our economy and we must change."

**Audience Comments**

The audience was invited to offer comments and pose questions to the panel. A broad range of topics was covered, including the need for real parental involvement and the need to focus on partnerships with other agencies such as the Department of Labor. Other topics, such as special education and assessments, were raised as well. One attendee urged ED officials to keep in mind that most students with disabilities can and should complete high school in four years with a regular diploma and only a small

number need extra time. A music educator wanted to stress to the panel that data should be used in formative as well as summative assessments and that policymakers must look at the contribution of all core subjects to producing college- and career-readiness, i.e., not just language arts and math.

The last two questions to the panel noted the importance of school climate and the personnel that help teachers and principals in this effort. Staff such as school counselors, psychologists and nurses cannot be forgotten as contributing to a successful school. Cahill responded to these questions agreeing that all parts of a school must work together to ensure student support, safety and personalization. Kanter also recommended that pupil services personnel reach out to full-service community schools around the country to become more involved in these efforts.

### **CONCLUSION**

This was the last of ED's ESEA Reauthorization Stakeholder forums. Transcripts and videos of these sessions can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/events/forum.html>. Stakeholders are also invited to submit comments to inform reauthorization to [ESEA.Comments@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Comments@ed.gov).