

Opening Statement of Rep. Todd Rokita
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Subcommittee Hearing on “Raising the Bar: How are Schools Measuring Teacher Performance?”
February 28, 2013

Good morning and welcome to our subcommittee hearing on teacher performance measurements. I'd like to thank our witnesses for joining us today to share their valuable insight on ways states and local school districts are working to ensure effective educators are in the classroom.

Teachers are one of the most influential factors on a student's academic success. I'm sure I'm not the only one in this room that can remember the teachers who inspired and motivated me as a child. And now that I'm a father of two boys, I am again seeing firsthand the difference an engaging teacher can make on a child's desire and ability to learn.

Over the next few months, we will renew our efforts to address the challenges facing K-12 schools. What better place to start than to discuss how states, school districts, and schools are evaluating teachers and exploring more innovative strategies that can help improve the academic success of children.

We all agree No Child Left Behind helped the nation take enormous steps toward a better education system, but we now recognize the law's shortfalls. One primary concern for many of us in this room is the way the law defined “good” teachers.

No Child Left Behind's rigid “Highly Qualified Teacher” provisions require educators to have a bachelor's degree, hold a state certification or license, and be able to demonstrate knowledge of the subject matter they plan to teach. That all sounds great in theory, but in reality it meant schools were forced to value an educator's credentials over his or her ability to effectively and successfully teach our children.

We all want well-qualified teachers in the classroom, but we must also recognize that a teacher's excellence cannot be measured by degrees and diplomas.

Recognizing the antiquated “Highly Qualified Teacher” requirements alone weren't helping schools attract the most promising teachers to the classroom, some states and school districts have been working to implement alternative methods to better evaluate the effectiveness of their teachers.

In recent years, a growing number of states and school districts have started developing new teacher evaluation systems that incorporate multiple measures and student performance data. Not only does this data help measure a teacher's success in the classroom, it also provides educators with valuable feedback to analyze and refine their methods. As a representative from the great state of Indiana, I am particularly pleased to welcome one of our Hoosier educators as a witness today, and look forward to hearing his insights about the importance of teacher evaluation at the local level.

In 2011, Tennessee became one of the first states in the country to implement a comprehensive student-outcomes based evaluation system. This system uses traditional measures such as teacher observations and personal conferences, but places significant emphasis on student achievement data.

Additionally, the new system prevents ineffective educators from staying in the classroom by directly addressing teacher tenure laws and “Last In, First Out” policies. Within one year of implementing its new evaluation system, Tennessee students made the biggest single-year jump in achievement ever recorded in the state.

In my home state of Indiana, the General Assembly approved legislation that calls upon school districts to create their own plans for annual performance evaluations or adopt one recommended by the state. The law sets requirements that every school must meet, but provides districts with resources and flexibility to find the methods that will help them meet those requirements. This is similar to a proposal passed out of this committee last Congress as part of our ESEA reform efforts, and I hope we will again consider such innovative policies in the 113th Congress.

I am looking forward to a productive conversation this morning with my colleagues and our witness panel about ways states and school districts are continuing to think outside of the box when it comes to recruiting, retaining, measuring and supporting the most effective educators in the classroom. I will now yield to my distinguished colleague, Carolyn McCarthy, for her opening remarks.