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“CUE & A” with Representative George Miller

Chairman, House Education & Labor Committee

Because of the profound effect federal and state legislation has on classroom practice, CUE’s Legislative Advocacy Committee sought an interview with Representative George Miller (D-CA). In his role as chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, Representative Miller is directly involved in developing and advocating for legislation regarding technology use in the classroom. CUE is grateful to Representative Miller for taking the time to share his thoughts on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT), and the new ATTAIN Act (Achievement Through Technology and Innovation).

CUE: What do you foresee to be the most significant changes for NCLB Reauthorization?

Rep. Miller: The committee has been exploring numerous proposals and recommendations for improvements to the No Child Left Behind law. First, I believe that we must stay true to the core principle of NCLB to close the achievement gap while still being responsive to legitimate concerns. Second, we cannot make strides to improve student achievement without recruiting and retaining qualified educators. This will be one of my central improvements that I plan to advance. We are also looking at numerous other improvements: looking at the way schools measure annual yearly progress, looking at the quality and appropriateness of assessments for students with disabilities and English language learners, addressing the high school dropout crisis, and providing flexibility on intervention strategies.

CUE: How likely is it that NCLB will be reauthorized this year? Where does your committee stand in terms of introducing a comprehensive NCLB reauthorization bill?

Rep. Miller: It is my goal to get reauthorization finished this year. I realize that this is an ambitious goal, but a goal that we should accomplish. The committee has held over a dozen hearings on issues surrounding NCLB and staff has been working diligently to keep on the timeline I set forth earlier this year.

CUE: Since its inception, many have viewed NCLB as an increasingly unfunded mandate. How can we build an authorization bill that assures funding?

Rep. Miller: It is critical that we put NCLB funding back on track and narrow the \$56 billion shortfall between what was promised and what has been provided.

I am working with Congressional leaders to make sure we get on the road of closing the gap on funding.

CUE: In light of the competitive nature of our emerging global economy, what role do you see technology playing in the lives of our students to prepare them for a world of work and learning in the 21st century?

Rep. Miller: Today’s students already have technology integrated into their daily lives and activities. However, students need to be able to understand how the technology works in order to be prepared for the competitive global economy, know how to use it as a tool to locate information, and then be able to critically analyze, synthesize, and communicate findings. Just as important, students will have to be able to adapt, invent, and learn new technologies that we don’t even know at this time exist.

CUE: Most members of CUE feel that the current requirement in NCLB that students be technologically literate by the eighth grade is important but are disappointed that the Department of Education has not collected data that enables us to measure progress towards meeting that goal. The ATTAIN Act legislation, introduced by Representatives Roybal-Allard and Hinojosa in May to revamp the existing Enhancing Education Through Technology portion of NCLB Title IID, would define student technology literacy and require that districts assess student progress towards attaining technological literacy (although not necessarily adding a high stakes test to the AYP tests that exist currently).

What is your reaction to the definition of student technology literacy as defined within the ATTAIN Act: “Student knowledge and skills in using contemporary information, communication and learning



Above: Representative Miller meets with students at St. Patrick-St. Vincent High School in Vallejo, CA. Picture used with permission (<www.house.gov/georgemiller/newweb/5-4-07st.pats-st.vincents.html>)

technologies in a manner necessary for successful life-long learning and citizenship in the knowledge-based, digital and global 21st Century, which includes the abilities to effectively communicate and collaborate; to analyze and solve problems; to access, evaluate, manage and create information and otherwise gain information literacy; and to do so in a safe and ethical manner.”

Rep. Miller: The goal is admirable. But, in order for students to become technologically literate, the digital divide first needs to be bridged in order for all students to have the opportunity to attain technology literacy. The committee is looking at this and other proposals to see where they may fit into NCLB reauthorization.

CUE: Do you think that some assessing progress towards achieving the goal of student technology literacy is critical?

Rep. Miller: As a nation, it is important to know what workforce and college ready skills our students possess. We are exploring ways on how technology literacy is both defined and measured.

CUE: Do you think that the current lack of data reporting requirements has undermined our ability to determine progress and should be altered going forward?

Rep. Miller: Access to reliable and comparable data is key to measuring any program’s effectiveness. The Department of Education needs to find some solutions in this area.

CUE: Do you think that technology literacy skills are vital for students to possess? If so, why?

Rep. Miller: Yes. If students are to successfully navigate today’s world and to have the ability to access educational and employment opportunities, they need to possess basic technology literacy skills.

CUE: From your perspective, what is the single biggest issue facing technology use in K-12 classrooms today—for example, lack of equipment, inadequate bandwidth, insufficient teacher technology training, etc.? Why do you come to this conclusion?

Rep. Miller: There isn’t just one single issue facing technology in all classrooms. In many states and districts it is the combination of lack of resources and training. One school system may struggle to provide the basics for students and technology spending may be considered a luxury. Similarly, another school could be fully wired with the most up-to-date technology, but unless an educator is fully trained on the latest, that technology is useless. We will need to continue to work to make sure all schools have the proper tools and trained staff they need to help children succeed in an ever increasing dynamic world.

CUE: Thank you for your time and effort. 

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