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“CUE & A” with Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard

Representative, California’s 34th Congressional District Member of the House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Funding for technology in schools has always been a challenging quest. California has not provided any significant funding since the days of DHS (Digital High School). The only significant source of funds for education technology today has been from the federal government as a part of NCLB. This program, called EETT (Enhancing Education Through Technology) has itself been reduced each year. Educators have only been able to keep its present, much reduced state through the massive outcry to reverse the Bush administration’s efforts to zero out the funding.

ATTAIN is the new legislation destined to replace EETT through the reauthorization of NCLB. As of the opening of the 2007-08 school year, it is awaiting passage in the US Congress and signature of the President. Lucille Roybal-Allard, Congresswoman from Los Angeles has been one of the key in authors and champions of this legislation. What follows are a set of questions we have posed to Congresswoman Roybal-Allard regarding ATTAIN.

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

Rep. Roybal-Allard: Technology plays an absolutely critical role in preparing our children for the challenges of the 21st Century. Regardless of whether students in my congressional district go onto college or whether they go straight to the workforce, technology will inevitably play a large role in their jobs and daily lives. We must provide them with the necessary skills to maintain a competitive edge in an environment that is increasingly dependent upon technology.

CUE: What are your top three funding priorities for K-12 (NCLB) education in this FY08 appropriations cycle?

Rep. Roybal-Allard: So many critical K-12 education programs have been drastically underfunded for years, making it a difficult task for me to pick only three as funding priorities. However, I have noticed from my seat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education that there are some programs that are routinely targeted by the Administration for deep cuts or even

elimination, even though they are effective learning tools. They include: The Enhancing Education Through Technology, or EETT, program; the Even Start Family Literacy program; and the Alcohol Abuse Reduction Program. In addition to these programs, I would underscore the tremendous importance of funding Title I, which is the backbone of the No Child Left Behind Act and provides funds to disadvantaged schools.

CUE: Do you support Chairman Obey’s effort to increase education funding overall in FY08? If yes, please explain...

Rep. Roybal-Allard: I absolutely support increases in education funding, and I believe that these increases are long overdue. For years, vital programs have received only level-funding, leaving them without the resources to keep pace with inflation. Other programs have sustained deep cuts, leaving school administrators forced to do more with less and, in many cases, serve fewer students. This year, Appropriations Chairman Rep. David Obey is taking the first steps toward restoring funds to programs that are most in need, and I wholeheartedly support that effort.

CUE: This year the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, HHS and Education allocated funding for educational technology. This was the first time since FY 05 that this subcommittee provided any dollars in this area. To what do you attribute this turnaround?

Rep. Roybal-Allard: I believe that Congress is finally beginning to understand how critical it is that our nation’s children be prepared to compete in the 21st Century, and that programs such as EETT are essential in giving students the technology skills they will need to succeed in this environment.

CUE: You are the lead sponsor of the ATTAIN Act. How important is the ongoing support of educational technology to your congressional district, which includes many school districts in Los Angeles County? To what extent does instructional technology coaching, mentoring, etc. transform classroom practice?

Rep. Roybal-Allard: Education technology is vitally important to my district, where classes are often overcrowded and teachers overextended. I introduced the Achieving Through Technology and Innovation (ATTAIN) Act because I saw first-hand the tremendous impact that technology can have on students. After visiting one



Representative Roybal-Allard

Los Angeles area school in my district that seamlessly integrated technology in the classroom, I was amazed to see students that were previously low performers academically and at-risk of dropping out of school – many because they were non-native English speakers – now engaged and eager to learn.

Additionally, a large part of the ATTAIN Act focuses on the need for professional development, with a requirement that 40% of all formula funds be dedicated for that purpose. This focus on professional development stems from a meeting of math and science teachers in a Los Angeles area school receiving education technology funds. Many were seasoned teachers who had been teaching the same class for 10, 15 or even 20 years. They related that, at first, they had been very resistant to any change in their teaching techniques. But after receiving training in how to use technology appropriately in the classroom, they felt empowered when they saw the “light bulbs” turn on for so many of their students who had been struggling with basic math and science concepts. All the teachers said that they could not imagine going back to teaching without technology tools.

CUE: In today’s global marketplace, the use of powerful technology tools is commonplace. However, current funding models for school districts make sustaining these essential tools nearly impossible. To succeed, our policies need to be changed. Technology tools are just as much consumables as textbooks and should be similarly funded and renewed. Do you agree with this approach?

Rep. Roybal-Allard: I absolutely agree.

If we want our students to get jobs with top-rated companies using state-of-the-art technology, they must be learning with modern equipment in the schools. The problem, of course, is that there is currently no comprehensive way to show the age of schools’ computers and software. I have tried to remedy this in the ATTAIN Act by requiring states to give guidance, technical assistance, and support on their plans to update computers, servers and software.

CUE: Do you think that the ATTAIN Act’s focus on professional development, systemic reform, and low achieving subgroups will, if it is passed, lead to increased funding for educational technology in FY09 and beyond? Please explain...

Rep. Roybal-Allard: Although you can never predict the budget outlook, I certainly hope that education technology will receive robust funding in the future. The goal of the ATTAIN Act was to respond to some of the critiques of the existing EETT program, namely that funds needed to be better-targeted toward the schools that need the most assistance, more prescriptive, and more focused on professional development. With these concerns addressed in the ATTAIN Act, I believe that we have a much better chance on ensuring sustained and robust funding for education technology into the future.



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