

A Commission Convened to Ensure Equity and Excellence in American Public Schools

Education is the great equalizer, the means to enable any child to realize the American dream. Children in America today, however, receive vastly unequal educational experiences and opportunities due to substantial differences in the education students receive depending on where they live. This barrier prevents too many children from realizing their potential, leading to ever more economic inequality in our society.

I introduced The Educational Opportunity and Equity Commission Act in order to identify solutions for eliminating the inequitable distribution of educational resources among American public schools. As a result of direction I included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2010, [the U.S. Department of Education established the Commission in January 2011](#). The Commission, a group of [28 nationally recognized leaders in the educational arena](#) currently co-chaired by Christopher Edley and Tino Cuellar, was charged with gathering information on how government can improve educational opportunities for students in American public schools.

Commission meetings were held in San Jose, Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Dallas. Public meetings were also convened in Washington, DC. The Commission is currently working to finalize its report, which will include discussion points involving a wide range of topics and issues found to be affecting the public school educational system.

Background:

Before becoming a Member of Congress, I spent many years as a teacher, principal, and school board member. I observed inequities in educational systems firsthand within local school districts, counties, and states. One reason for the inequity was the variation in local property tax structures. Simply put, schools with students living in wealthier neighborhoods received more tax dollars by virtue of the revenues generated by local property taxes. Schools serving

students in poorer neighborhoods received less funding based on lower property tax revenues.

For example, in Silicon Valley, one school district spent nearly twice as much per student as a similarly sized school district nearby, based on data for the 2004-5 school year. Consequently, this district had higher teacher salaries, lower student-teacher ratios, higher standardized test scores, and higher graduation rates than its neighbor. In a comparison of performance of the two school districts based on state tests, the higher spending district's lowest scoring school ranked better than all but four of the schools in its lower spending neighboring district.

These disparities exist nationwide - our highest spending American school district spends nine times more per pupil than the district with the lowest per pupil funding. Disparities like these should not exist in America, yet they continue to persist. Eliminating these disparities will provide the means for all Americans to achieve their individual success and ensure America's global leadership and economic competitiveness in the 21st century.

My Vision of Equity

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The notion that EACH and EVERY child will receive the necessary resources they need individually to thrive in our nation's schools.

Throughout history, our nation has fought to achieve parity for our youngsters. Educational parity is the notion that all American school students, regardless of their individual learning needs, would receive the same per pupil funding (with schools being funded based on Average Daily Attendance). However, we know that children have a variety of needs and some will cost more to educate than others. Therefore, educational parity has not delivered true educational equity because it has not solved the inequities in our school financing systems.

Conversely, educational equity is the belief that all students have the guaranteed right to access quality educational programs, regardless of their costs for the individual student. For some

students, the cost of these quality programs may be invariably higher than for other students based on their needs. Under a system of educational equity, more school dollars would be spent to support the children with the greatest needs. We must strive for educational equity in order to close the damaging achievement gap that exists today between children coming from a spectrum of different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. Only by focusing on the concept of equity can our nation provide for the historically overdue equality of opportunity in our school system.

The needs of each child can be determined by conducting a thorough assessment for each child during their pre-K years. From that assessment, a road map will be developed to determine what resources a child will need to meet her or his individual needs and thus achieve educational success and equity. With this notion, it is clear that the strategy for attaining equity lies in meeting the needs of each child.

We need to respond to the inequity in educational systems across the United States by implementing changes to the school financing structure that result in fundamental and lasting institutional reform at the state and federal levels. This is precisely why I sponsored the Educational Opportunity and Equity Commission Act. At the heart of this endeavor is the mission to restructure school finance systems to achieve equity in the distribution of educational resources and diminish the achievement gap between underrepresented and underserved youth.

It is critical that the Commission's report be urgent and compelling, for it can change the direction for U.S. public schools in decades to come. Minus this mission, we continue to rob our children of their most precious resource - time, time spent daily in our compulsory but inequitable school system. Ultimately these bold and strategic recommendations will formulate the prescription to close the achievement gap that currently exists between individual schools, school districts and states. This will result in excellence and equity for each and every student receiving public school education throughout our great Nation.

You can read more of my thoughts about educational equity and the Commission in the following articles:

<http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2011/Honda.pdf>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rep-mike-honda/equity-at-the-core-of-int_b_799297.html

<http://www.examiner.com/article/mike-honda-praises-new-appointment-to-help-school-funding-equity>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rep-mike-honda/superman-needed-to-save-e_b_732896.html

<http://milpitas.patch.com/articles/congressman-honda-on-inequities-in-our-public-education-system>

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/education/129985-redefining-the-federal-role-in-public-education-rep-mike-honda>