

Helping at-risk youth succeed in school and on the job is one of the most important tasks facing our society.

I recently spoke at a conference sponsored by [Jobs for America's Graduates](#) (JAG), a non-profit corporation addressing this problem across the country. JAG develops programs targeting at-risk students to:

- prevent students from dropping out of school
- find jobs for graduating high school seniors and
- help students who have dropped out of school to fulfill graduation requirements or get their GED

The symposium, "Closing the Achievement Gap in Education and Employment Outcomes for At-Risk Minority Youth," focused on exactly the right question: How do we take initiatives with demonstrated effectiveness and apply the lessons learned to continue to improve the success rates of high-risk youth?

We must find solutions that engage students in our schools, reduce the high school drop out rates of our high-risk students, and provide enhanced opportunities for students to successfully transition from school into the workforce.

The participants at the conference have been advising Members of Congress on how to meet the needs of our communities and, most importantly, the full range of youth at risk in our nation. An important part of this dialogue are the business partners that are stepping up to the plate and helping support effective programs and approaches. Another important step is engaging national and local community based organizations. There are many different ethnic specific organizations that understand the needs of the diverse communities within the United States.

Equity Among Students

We must be certain that in our efforts to support and improve programs, we also challenge our thinking about the structure of schools in the 21 st century. I have spent many decades observing the inequity in the education provided by different schools within states, counties, and even within a single school district. These disparities plague our nation's schools and have

detrimental consequences to society.

For example, in my Silicon Valley region, one school district spends nearly twice as much per student as a nearby, similarly sized school district. Consequently, this district has 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 ranks higher than all but four of the schools in its lower spending neighboring district.

These disparities exist nationwide – our highest spending American school district spends 9.12 times more per pupil than the district with the lowest per pupil funding. Disparities like this should not exist in America, yet they continue to persist, most negatively affecting our most vulnerable, high-risk, communities.

All students have the right to have their individual educational needs met regardless of their socioeconomic situation, national origin, gender, or where they go to school. Providing sufficient funding to foster the maximum development of individual potential helps ensure that all students develop the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively in community life as workers, citizens, parents, leaders, and role models for future generations.

The Citizens' Educational Equity Commission Act

In order to further this dialogue, I will be introducing the "The Citizens' Educational Equity Commission Act" to identify solutions for eliminating the inequitable distribution of resources among our schools. This legislation will empower The Citizens' Educational Equity Commission to gather insights and public opinions about how the government can improve education.

This group will be charged with holding hearings and community meetings across the country to explore this issue in depth, seeking input, and developing strategies to guarantee equity among our Nation's schools. Eliminating these disparities will provide the means for all Americans to achieve individual success, assure the Nation's economic competitiveness, and ensure America's global leadership in the 21st century.

Educational equity is not simply equal dollars behind each student; it is funding based on each student's individual needs. Parents, teachers, and administrators must work with Congress to

Jobs for America's Graduates, fixing educational and economic disparities in America

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ensure that we establish an education system that meets the needs of every child wherever they live.