

Colloquy on McMorris Rodgers Amendment to H.R. 5

[For What Purpose Does the Gentlewoman from Washington State Rise?]

Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk.

[The Gentlewoman from Washington State is recognized for 5 minutes in support of her amendment.]

Mr. Chairman, no one in this chamber would argue the fact that a strong education system is foundational to keeping our nation competitive and a leader in the 21st century and beyond.

And, no one in this Chamber will argue that a strong, quality education for our children is integral for their growth, their development and their success for whatever path they choose.

Yet, for a segment of the student population – access to a quality education can sometimes be a struggle. I appreciate Chairman Kline's leadership as Chair of the Education Committee. There are things about this legislation that are positive. The bill maintains requirements that states test all students in reading, math, and science, and report that data, disaggregated by subgroup, so we can begin the process of providing transparency on student performance. I also thank the Chairman for working with me to include language in the manager's amendment around universal design for learning to improve the accessibility of assessments.

But I remain concerned that the protections in this bill for students with disabilities are inadequate. I know firsthand the positive impact of including students with special needs into the general curriculum. Further, I know that having access to the right assessments and curriculum drives student progress and achievement. My son Cole is a thriving six year old who is learning at grade level – and yes he has Down syndrome.

I am concerned, though, that Cole, and other children like him, could see access to the general curriculum diminished by this bill. The *Student Success Act* removes a cap that currently exists that limits the percentage of students to whom schools can administer an alternate assessment aligned to alternate standards. My amendment would restore it. Without this cap, I believe schools will abuse their authority and students will suffer. I believe we can return greater flexibility to states and still maintain key protections for students like Cole. Flexibility for states *is not* mutually exclusive of accountability.

[Yield to Mr. Harper for one minute]

For these reasons, I would ask that the Chairman of the Committee to work with me, Mr. Harper, and others who have also expressed concerns as this process moves forward. To that end, would the Chairman engage in a colloquy with me concerning the importance of supporting students with disabilities?

Mr. KLINE. I will be happy to do so.

Mrs. McMorris Rodgers. Mister Chairman, as I said before, there are things about the bill before us that are positive, and I thank the Chairman for his thoughtful approach to this reauthorization. However, I am very concerned about what I believe to be the lack of sufficient protections for students with disabilities. These students are often our most vulnerable and as we work to reform our education laws we should maintain the strong supports these students need to thrive.

Chairman Kline, would you be willing to work with me and other Members with similar concerns as the reauthorization process continues to ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, have access to a high-quality education? And I will yield to the Gentleman.

Mr. KLINE. I thank the Gentlewoman for yielding. Let me thank my colleague from Washington for her leadership on this important issue and for her remarks today. I understand the passion and knowledge she brings to this topic.

Throughout this reauthorization process, we have sought to recalibrate the federal role in education, undoing the excesses of the past while maintaining provisions of the law that ensure parents and communities have the information they need to evaluate their schools' and students' performance. As the Gentlewoman acknowledged, we do maintain requirements for disaggregated achievement data, so that special needs students' achievement won't be masked by high averages among all students.

On the topic of the Gentlewoman's amendment, we do maintain current requirements that narrowly define the population of students eligible to take an alternate assessment. I believe these are important provisions that will limit the possibility of abuse by schools.

That said, I share my colleague's desire to see all students, including those with special needs, succeed in school and beyond. And I am happy to work with her and other Members on this issue as the reauthorization process continues.

I yield back to the Gentlewoman.

Mrs. McMorris Rodgers. Reclaiming my time, I thank the Gentleman for his comments. Given your commitment, it is my intention to withdraw my amendment and offer support for this legislation to move this process forward. I again applaud the Gentleman for his work on this and look forward to working with him and my other colleagues to address these important issues moving forward.

I reserve the balance of my time.

[Mr. Miller can claim time in opposition, though he will not oppose, and speak on behalf of the amendment. He will then either reserve his time or yield back.]

Mrs. McMorris Rodgers. I thank the Gentleman from California for his comments and his support of this amendment. As I said before, though, given the Gentleman from Minnesota's pledge to work with me as the reauthorization process moves forward, I ask unanimous consent to withdraw my amendment. [Without objection.] I thank the Chair and yield back the balance of my time.

[If Mr. Miller yielded back after his comments, debate is over. If he reserved, then he has the right to close.]