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NEWS RELEASE

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Education Commissioner McWalters Testifies Before Congressional Committee on NCLB

Education Commissioner Peter McWalters testified today (March 21st, 2007) before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor at a Full Committee hearing on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

The hearing addressed the topic of "Options for Improving NCLB's Measures of Progress."

Commissioner McWalters asked the committee members to consider several changes in the five-year-old law concerning how states determine whether schools have met their targets, how states publicly identify schools that have missed their targets, and how states can best deliver assistance to help schools meet their goals.

He argued that the law should allow states to use indicators in addition to test scores to measure school progress, that the law should allow for a graduated system of classification so that schools that miss targets receive classifications that more accurately reflect their progress and capacity, and that the law should not proscribe what steps states must take once schools miss their annual targets.

"We need a system that will give us multiple ways to measure all components of the health and the capacity of schools and districts and to offer scaffolded responses based on the needs of the school or district," McWalters said. "The system as it stands is not designed to give schools a blueprint for success. It is a retributive system."

Commissioner McWalters noted that he supported NCLB from the time of its passage in 2001. "It represents the best form of federal intent and has pushed states to focus on success for every student," McWalters said. "But now, five years down the road, I think we can see some areas in which the law could and should be modified to help us achieve the goals that we all share."

He cited several examples of model programs from Rhode Island, including the NECAP testing system, which is the first multistate testing partnership in the nation; the annual SALT Survey of all students, teachers, and parents; and the system of Progressive Support and Intervention for schools and districts that have missed their annual targets.

"We need from NCLB more than just a scorecard based on student performance and a list of mandated responses," McWalters said. "We need the freedom and capacity to do our work, while always keeping the goals clear and the actions and outcomes transparent so as to improve the public-education system."

His written testimony will be posted on the RIDE Web site, www.ride.ri.gov

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