

Paul Vallas, Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools has also asked for this flexibility. Chicago Public Schools have been the model of many reforms such as ending social promotion. He told my Committee earlier this year that they wanted the federal government to be a partner, not a puppet master. He said that instead

What we want is greater flexibility in the use of federal funds coupled with great accountability for achieving the desired results. We in Chicago, for example, would be delighted to enter into a contract with the Department of Education, specifying what we would achieve with our students, and with selected groups of students.

And we would work diligently to fulfill—and exceed—the terms of such a contract. We would be held accountable for the result.

Who are we to say you can't improve, you can't reform, you can't succeed? Much of what is new in Title I is taken from what States like Texas and Florida and cities like Chicago have shown to be effective. Why should we ask them to abide by our program requirements, when their programs are the ones that are working and improving achievement and the federal programs are not?

For more than three decades the Federal government has sent hundreds of billions of dollars to the States through scores of Washington-based education programs. Has this enormous investment helped improve student achievement? Unfortunately, we have no evidence that it has.

After thirty years and more than \$120 billion, Title I has not had the desired effect of closing achievement gaps.

States now have access to "Ed-Flex," which we passed earlier this year in spite of the Administration's initial protests.

Ed-Flex gives schools and school districts more freedom to tailor Federal education programs to meet their needs and remove obstacles to reform.

Ed-Flex, however, was only a first step. Ed-Flex is designed to make categorical Federal programs work better at the local level. But States still have to follow federal priorities and requirements that may or may not address the needs of children in their state. It is time to modernize the Federal education funding mechanism investment so that it reflects the needs of States and school districts for the 21st century.

For those States or school districts that choose to participate, Straight A's will fundamentally change the relationship between the Federal government and the States.

Straight A's will untie the hands of those States that have strong accountability systems in place, in exchange for meeting student performance improvement targets. This sort of accountability for performance does not exist in current law: states must improve achievement to participate in Straight A's. And if they let their scores go down for the first three years, they can get kicked out before the five year term is up. Nothing happens to States that decline for three years in current law.

States do not even have to report overall performance gains or demonstrate that all groups of students are making progress.

Straight A's frees States to target all of their federal dollars on disadvantaged students and narrowing achievement gaps, which could mean an additional \$5 billion for needy children if all states participated. Under current law, States couldn't target more federal dollars

for this purpose. This legislation also rewards those States that significantly narrow achievement gaps with a five percent reward, an incentive that does not exist in current law.

When we pass Straight A's, all students, especially the disadvantaged students who were the focus of Federal legislation in 1965, may finally receive effective instruction and be held to high standards.

For too long States and schools have been able to hide behind average test scores, and to show that they are helping disadvantaged children merely by spending money in the right places. That must come to an end when states participate in Straight A's. States and school districts must now focus on the most effective way of improving achievement, not on just complying with how the federal government says they have to spend their money.

Schools should be free to focus on improving teacher quality, implement research-based instruction, and operate effective after-school programs. Federal process requirements have created huge amounts of paperwork for people at the local level, and distract from improving student learning.

I would encourage everyone to listen carefully when people talk about accountability: Are they talking about accountability for process—making sure States and districts meet federal guidelines and priorities, the "check-off" system, or are they talking about accountability for real gains in academic achievement? Will achievement gaps close as a result, or will States just have to fill out a lot of paperwork about numbers of children served without any mention of performance improvements.

I know that most of you from the other side of the aisle are poised to shoot down this opportunity to advance effective education reform in the States and local school districts. I hope I can encourage you to have an open mind—to think outside the box—and consider this important piece of legislation. Listen to the people who are turning around low performing schools and districts. They want Straight A's.

Let's give the States that choose to do so the opportunity to build on their successes and improve the achievement of all of their students. The federal government can lend a helping hand rather than a strangle hold.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Chairman, those who wish to diminish federal control over education should cast an unenthusiastic yes vote for the Academic Achievement for All Students Freedom and Accountability Act (STRAIGHT "A's"). While this bill does increase the ability of state and local governments to educate children free from federal mandates and regulations, and is thus a marginal improvement over existing federal law, STRAIGHT "A's" fails to challenge the federal government's unconstitutional control of education. In fact, under STRAIGHT "A's" states and local school districts will still be treated as administrative subdivisions of the federal education bureaucracy. Furthermore, this bill does not remove the myriad requirements imposed on states and local school districts by federal bureaucrats in the name of promoting "civil rights." Thus, a school district participating in STRAIGHT "A's" will still have to place children in failed bilingual education programs or face the wrath of the Department of Education's misnamed Office of Civil Rights.

The fact that this bill increases, however marginally, the ability of states and localities to

control education, is a step forward. As long as the federal government continues to levy oppressive taxes on the American people, and then funnel that money back to the states to use for education programs, defenders of the Constitution should support all efforts to reduce the hoops through which states must jump in order to reclaim some of the people's tax monies.

However, there are a number of both practical and philosophical concerns regarding this bill. While the additional flexibility granted under this bill will be welcomed by the ten states allowed by the federal overseers to participate in the program, there is no justification to deny this flexibility to the remaining forty states. After all, federal education money represents the return of funds illegitimately taken from the American taxpayers to their states and communities. It is the pinnacle of arrogance for Congress to pick and choose which states are worthy of relief from federal strings in how they use what is, after all, the people's money.

The primary objection to STRAIGHT "A's" from a constitutional viewpoint, is embedded in the very mantra of "accountability" stressed by the drafters of the bill. Talk of accountability begs the question: accountable to whom? Under this bill, schools remain accountable to federal bureaucrats and those who develop the state tests upon which a participating school's performance is judged. Should the schools not live up to their bureaucratically-determined "performance goals," they will lose the flexibility granted to them under this act. So federal and state bureaucrats will determine if the schools are to be allowed to participate in the STRAIGHT "A's" programs and bureaucrats will judge whether the states are living up to the standards set in the state's five-year education plan—yet this is supposed to debureaucratize and decentralize education!

Under the United States Constitution, the federal government has no authority to hold states "accountable" for their education performance. In the free society envisioned by the founders, schools are held accountable to parents, not federal bureaucrats. However, the current system of leveling oppressive taxes on America's families and using those taxes to fund federal education programs denies parental control of education by denying them control over the education dollar. Because "he who pays the piper calls the tune," when the federal government controls the education dollar schools will obey the dictates of federal "educrats" while ignoring the wishes of the parents.

In order to provide parents with the means to hold schools accountable, I have introduced the Family Education Freedom Act (H.R. 935). The Family Education Freedom Act restores parental control over the classroom by providing American parents a tax credit of up to \$3,000 for the expenses incurred in sending their child to private, public, parochial, other religious school, or for home schooling their children.

The Family Education Freedom Act returns the fundamental principal of a truly free economy to America's education system: what the great economist Ludwig von Mises called "consumer sovereignty." Consumer sovereignty simply means consumers decide who succeeds or fails in the market. Businesses that best satisfy consumer demand will be the most successful. Consumer sovereignty is the

means by which the free society maximizes human happiness.

When parents control the education dollar, schools must be responsive to parental demands that their children receive first-class educations, otherwise, parents will find alternative means to educate their children. Furthermore, parents whose children are in public schools may use their credit to improve their schools by helping to finance the purchase of educational tools such as computers or extra-curricular activities such as music programs. Parents of public school students may also wish to use the credit to pay for special services for their children.

It is the Family Education Freedom Act, not STRAIGHT "A's", which represents the education policy best suited for a constitutional republic and a free society. The Family Education Freedom Act ensures that schools are accountable to parents, whereas STRAIGHT "A's" continues to hold schools accountable to bureaucrats.

Since the STRAIGHT "A's" bill does give states an opportunity to break free of some federal mandates, supporters of returning the federal government to its constitutional limits should support it. However, they should keep in mind that this bill represents a minuscule step forward as it fails to directly challenge the federal government's usurpation of control over education. Instead, this bill merely gives states greater flexibility to fulfill federally-defined goals. Therefore, Congress should continue to work to restore constitutional government and parental control of education by defunding all unconstitutional federal programs and returning the money to America's parents so that they may once again control the education of their children.

Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 2300, the so-called "Academic Achievement for All Act." With this bill, the Republican majority takes a step backward by eliminating our federal commitment to education and washing the federal government's hands of its responsibility to our nation's students.

H.R. 2300 would establish a pilot program to allow ten states to use federal funds designated for programs like Safe and Drug Free Schools, Literacy Challenge Fund, and Title I funds, for virtually anything they deem "educationally relevant." This essentially amounts to the block granting of Title I funds, which are critically important to the disadvantaged students in my district.

Title I of ESEA has done more for our nation's poor children than any other program. The possibility that this money may never reach our neediest students could have a devastating and lasting effect on their future. H.R. 2300, however, would allow states to give away federal funds specifically targeted for schools and students with the greatest need and give them to more affluent and wealthier school districts. This is just plain wrong.

The proponents of H.R. 2300 claim that state flexibility from federal requirements will focus more funding and attention on the needs of low-income and minority students. But the track record of most states, in the use of their own dollars suggests that low-income students lose, not gain, when states are not directed to do so. A 1998 GAO report which focused on state and federal efforts to target poor students found that, in 45 of the 47 states studied, federal funds were more targeted at low-

income students than were state funds. The report further found that combining federal and state funds as proposed by this bill, would decrease the likelihood that the funding would reach the neediest students.

Mr. Chairman, no one is arguing against promoting high academic standards for all children. But in order to accomplish this we need to target limited resources to children with the greatest need. The truth is that only a strong federal role in reduction will assure that all children have equal access to a quality education.

Instead of weakening educational progress by promoting legislation such as H.R. 2300, I hope that my colleagues will work in a bipartisan way to strengthen accountability provisions to ensure that states are held responsible for the achievement of all their students, regardless of their income.

I urge my colleagues to vote against this ill-conceived and counterproductive bill.

Mr. WU. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in strong opposition to H.R. 2300, the so-called Academic Achievement for all Act (Straight A's Act).

For the past two days, Members from both sides of the aisle have worked together on the House floor to pass H.R. 2, the Student results Act. This bill strengthens Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We were able to pass a bi-partisan bill that is good for our nation's children. Before the ink is even dry, the Majority party is seeking to overturn the improvements that we joined together to pass.

The Straight A's Act is plain and simple, a blank check without safeguards. The bill would block grant nearly ¾ of federal education programs including Title I, Eisenhower Professional Development for Teachers, and the Class-Size Initiative. I shudder to imagine how many students will fall through the cracks.

Under this scheme, gone would be the focus on specific national concerns of federal education programs that have evolved over thirty-five years with strong bipartisan support. Gone would be the targeting of funds based on identified need which now helps assure services for students who need them.

I agree with the proponents of the legislation that we need to provide more control and flexibility to the local level, which is why I worked to secure passage of the Education Flexibility Act. Ed Flex lifts burdensome and unneeded federal regulations to provide local schools flexibility and the opportunity for innovation. Let us continue on the path of passing common-sense legislation that meets these goals without cheating our nation's school children. H.R. 2300 is not the answer. I urge Members to vote against the bill.

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 2300, the Academic Achievement for All Act. This legislation is nothing less than a block grant program that gives states a "blank check" for billions of dollars, without accountability or protection of our most disadvantaged students.

I cannot support legislation that attempts to educate our children on the backs of poor students.

H.R. 2300 would allow states to convert part of all Federal aid into private school vouchers; and it would allow states to take funding for poor schools and give it to the most affluent students; and it would allow states to take funds appropriated specifically for special

needs students, and use it for the general student population.

H.R. 2300 guts the very core of Title I, the nation's \$8 billion flagship program for our poorest students, by allowing States to distribute funds in a way that the governors and State legislatures decide, instead of by need and poverty-based allocation procedures.

And this bill would eviscerate other federal programs targeted at disadvantaged students. For instance, class size reduction allocations are based largely on the number of poor children in each district. Similarly, criteria for State allocation of Safe and Drug-Free Schools funds to local education agencies include "high-need factors" such as high rates of drug use or student violence.

Most Federal education programs were created specifically to serve disadvantaged groups, after Congress found that States and localities were not meeting the needs of those groups on their own. Today, the GAO still finds that State funding formulas are significantly less targeted on high-need districts and children than are Federal formulas. We must not give these States the opportunity to take money away from their poorest children.

I am also concerned that H.R. 2300 will strike our national priorities, despite overwhelming public support for these areas. For example, national leadership by Congress to reduce class size in the early grades, tackle youth and drug alcohol abuse, provide professional development for teachers, and enhance technology in the schools have already reaped rewards. H.R. 2300 would allow the States to ignore these important priorities.

Moreover, I find it ludicrous that the Republican Majority would pass this Super-flex bill after a four day mark-up H.R. 2. H.R. 2, as amended by the Committee, maintains targeting requirements to serve poorest schools, first, increase funding for Title I schools, requires parent report cards to help parents hold schools accountable, requires all teachers to become fully accountable, prohibits use of Title I funds for private vouchers, requires all states to have rigorous standards and assessments, and makes permanent the comprehensive, research based educational school reform program that helps communities overhaul struggling schools.

H.R. 2300 eviscerates these reforms.

The Republicans have attempted to pass block grants before, most recently with its Dollars to the Classroom legislation. However, their Block grants have failed because they lack accountability and they lead to decreased funding.

For example, in 1981, Congress consolidated 26 programs into a single block grant (now Title VI of ESEA). Since then, funding for Title VI has dwindled, falling 63 percent in real terms since 1981. Today, the program has no accountability, no focus, and can demonstrate no success in improving educational achievement. And the Republicans want to do it all over again with H.R. 2300.

The Republican Majority's emphasis on block granting, eliminating oversight and accountability, and eliminating targeting, flies in the face of the "Academic Achievement for All" that the Majority purport to want. Only a strong federal role in education will assure that all children have equal access and equal opportunity to quality education.

While Super-flex may be a bonanza for governors, it excludes local school district participation. The Council of Great City Schools,