

Congressman Larson Speaks Out Against Education Secretary's Ruling on School Reform in Connecticut

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 5, 2005

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WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) issued a statement today on the U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings's final refusal to waive standardized testing requirements for Connecticut's school children in grades 3, 5 and 7. Although Connecticut has led the nation in quality education and has tested students in the 4th, 6th, and 8th grade for twenty years, the Department of Education will force the state to spend \$8 million to implement additional testing requirements under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"A one size fits all approach to education is not what members of Congress imagined or authorized," Larson said. "No Child Left Behind was signed into law because Congress and the Administration agreed we needed to raise school standards and ensure student achievement these important goals remain today. However, the Administration has repeatedly shortchanged No Child Left Behind and shifted the financial burden to our states and towns to make up the difference. For former teachers like myself, it's disappointing Secretary Spellings fails to recognize Connecticut's outstanding education record and the advances Connecticut has made in closing student achievement gaps."

Last month, Larson co-sponsored the No Child Left Behind Reform Act, introduced by fellow Connecticut Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro. The reform act would give states more flexibility in measuring student achievement. In 2003, Larson co-sponsored the Keeping Our Promises to America's Children Act, which would allow a state education agency or school district to suspend implementation of the NCLB provisions until it is fully funded.

Connecticut is one of only 5 states to date to fully implement the NCLB requirements. The state's tests are among the hardest; its students are among the highest-performing; and its teachers are among the best educated. Among minority and disadvantaged student, the state is making considerable strides. From 2000 to 2004, the achievement of black and Hispanic students statewide increased at a faster rate than white students. Similarly, students who live in our seven most disadvantaged cities and towns increased at faster rates than the achievement of their wealthier counterparts.

Connecticut is not the only state to chafe under the legislation's requirements. Utah's legislature passed a bill that allows Utah schools ignore the 2002 No Child Left Behind education law if its mandates conflict with state priorities or require state money to meet them. The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest teachers' union, with school districts in Michigan, Texas and Vermont, filed suit against the Federal Government, claiming that No Child is severely underfunded. Maine is considering joining.

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