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## OPINION EDITORIAL

### The Cost Of Even One Child Left Behind Is Too High

By Congressman Charles B. Rangel

January 26, 2007 5:21 PM

As Congress prepares to consider reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, I look forward to working with Chairman Miller of the Education and Labor Committee to address the shortcomings in the law's implementation. Education officials across the country, while generally supportive of the law, are right in complaining that it has unfairly burdened school districts because it fails to provide sufficient funding for full implementation. That needs to be corrected.

The law's most critical shortcoming, in my view, is its failure to address the growing crisis in the nation's high schools in both urban and rural areas, where about 30 percent of all students drop out before graduating. In Black, Latino and Native American communities, the crisis is spiraling out of control with close to 60 percent of those students leaving high school before graduation.

This phenomenon is a dangerous threat to our economic and national security, as well as the stability of our families. In today's global marketplace, education is the key to personal success as well as that of American business. That is why the failure of our high schools in preparing sufficient numbers of young Americans for existing jobs is a growing concern to U.S. business leaders.

The consequences of these failures are having a substantial negative impact on the national treasury. Due to the soaring high school drop-out rate, America is losing an estimated \$60 billion per year in lost tax revenue, and another \$192 billion--1.6 percent of GDP--in combined losses of income and tax revenue with each cohort of 18 year olds who never complete high school. Increasing the educational attainment of that group by one year alone would recoup nearly half those losses.

Dropouts who do not obtain a GED, re-enter high school, or learn a trade are likely to experience a lifetime of limited earning power. Many will become welfare dependent and are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. If the federal No Child Left Behind Act fails to address the needs of those most at-risk at the high school level it will ultimately risk whatever success it achieves in K-8.

Educational failure directly affects even the nation's military by substantially shrinking the pool of potential recruits. Over half of today's youth, aged 16 to 21, do not qualify for service in the Armed Forces because they cannot meet entry standards for education, health, aptitude, or morals. Two million Black men between the ages of 20 and 39 are unqualified for educational reasons.

Poor educational attainment is the most significant causative factor in poverty. Testimony at recent hearings before the House Ways and Means Committee suggests that children growing up in poverty ultimately cost the economy \$500 billion a year because they are less productive, earn less money, commit more crimes and have more health-related expenses. Today in America approximately 37 million people live below the poverty line.

As we transition to a knowledge-based global economy, employers are placing greater value on the applied skills of leadership, critical thinking, and problem solving. These workplace imperatives create new challenges for educators.

The business community must partner with teacher training institutions and teachers advocates in order to provide the opportunity for educators to participate in industry-based internships that facilitate the development of industry-responsive curricula.



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Our teacher training institutions must ensure that future teachers are prepared for the challenges of today's schools. They must understand and respect the unique needs of poor children, and most important, be equipped with the skills to create instructional strategies that are relevant to the workplace, and ensure the mastery of basic academic and workplace literacy.

Members of Congress must engage educational institutions, business leaders, and teachers in a dialogue that stresses the importance of graduation rates and workforce preparation that is rigorous, relevant, and responsive to the reality of the global workplace.

Our combined failure to turn around our elementary and high schools will burden the society with incalculable costs. Education supplies not just the skills for economic and social advancement, but also the hope that circumstances can change. In a democracy, it encourages participation in the political process.

Our society cannot afford to "write-off" a single child. Congress must work to ensure that the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind provides the financial support and instructional flexibility to allow teachers to provide for the educational needs of every child. America cannot afford to leave one more child behind.

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