

DATE: May 16, 2023

RE: House Committee on Education and the Workforce: “Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Department of Education”

Overview:

On Tuesday, May 16, 2023, the Committee on Education and the Workforce held a hearing titled “Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Department of Education,” where committee members discussed with the Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, the trending education policy concerns and objectives. See the full hearing details [here](#).

Witness Panel

- **The Honorable Miguel Cardona**, Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, [Testimony](#)

Opening Statements

Chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC)

- The Department of Education has been unresponsive to oversight letters and has engaged in disingenuous actions.
- The department has repeatedly used executive fiat to legislate the President's student debt scheme, costing taxpayers billions.
- The proposed alteration to the income-driven repayment plan will cost at least \$230 billion over the next decade.
- The department's policies on student debt cancellation disproportionately benefit higher earners and burden blue-collar workers.
- The department has rewritten Title IX, redefining sex as an ideological construct and allowing self-identification for gender identity.
- The department's emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion in history grants coincides with record-low history scores for eighth graders.
- School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant setback in core curricula and the department's mismanagement of relief funds.
- The budget proposal includes a \$10.8 billion increase in discretionary spending for the Department of Education, which Foxx questions given the department's lack of accountability and responsiveness.

Ranking Member Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ)

- Acknowledged the 69th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision.
- Recognized that public schools in America are still racially and economically segregated.
- Plans to reintroduce legislation, including the Strength and Diversity Act and the Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act, to address school segregation and fulfill the promise of Brown.
- Showed appreciation for the Biden-Harris administration's support of public schools, students, and educators, including the largest federal investment in K-12 education in history and forgiveness of student loan debt.
- Mentioned efforts to protect student safety and civil rights, such as updating Title IX rules and providing guidance for students with disabilities.
- Emphasized the importance of the President's budget proposals, highlighting increased funding for underserved schools, Pell Grants, and career and technical education, as well as criticism of Republican policies that harm students and educators.

Witness Testimony

Miguel Cardona

- Investing in children is as important as investing in defense, as it protects the future, strengthens society, and reinforces the prosperity of the country and its economy.
- The budget request aims to invest in the future of children and the nation.
- Investments include expanding high-quality preschool, improving education in Title One schools, ensuring highly qualified teachers, providing better learning conditions, and doubling funding for full-service community schools.
- The budget also focuses on pathways to careers, making post-secondary education inclusive and affordable, and raising the bar for education collectively while appreciating common ground and the importance of a brighter future for young people.

Question and Answer

- **Committee Chair Virginia Foxx (R-NC)** asked about the restart of loan payments and if there would be any more extensions of the payment repayment pause.
 - Cardona responded that the targeted debt relief plan proposed by President Biden would provide relief to millions of Americans. He expressed confidence in a positive outcome from the awaited Supreme Court decision and stated that loan repayments would start within 60 days of the decision.
 - Foxx asked for specific interim and final action steps advised to loan servicers in preparation for the restart. Cardona assured that their team was working with loan servicers to provide the necessary details.
 - Foxx asked if someone from the department had directly communicated with the loan servicers since January 2023, to which Cardona promised that the requested information would be provided.
 - Foxx asked about compensation for loan servicers and the potential reduction in service levels and funding. Cardona responded that there is a need for sufficient funding to provide good service to borrowers and stated that the budget reflected their commitment to that goal.
 - Foxx asked if teachers, administrators, and school boards should support parents and not undermine them, to which Cardona acknowledged the role of parents as the primary teachers and emphasized the importance of engaging them in a meaningful way. Cardona also mentioned a report on school districts allowing students to use names and pronouns aligned with their gender identity without parental knowledge and consent.
 - Foxx questioned if such practices undercut parents, and Cardona responded that decisions like that are made at the local level, and the federal government doesn't have a role in them.
- **Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ)** stated the proposed budget by the IT administration was seen as an investment and considered it a good strategy. Grijalva asked about the Republican budget, which called for a 22 percent cut based on levels from 2020 to 2022, with the premise that the military would not be affected. He stated the need for investment in public schools to address this transition and the detrimental impact of cutting programs on these populations.
 - Cardona acknowledged the significance of federal dollars in assisting students in need, particularly Title I students struggling with reading. The plan aimed to improve literacy, numeracy, and overall student achievement. Cuts in areas such as Title I and IDEA would

- have a negative impact. Students with disabilities were severely affected by the pandemic due to limited access to small group settings and individual device support.
- Grijalva criticized the mention of ideological and cultural issues dominating the education discussion and stated the importance of addressing fundamental needs and providing necessary resources.
 - Grijalva stated the need to balance parental rights with children's access to accurate and empirical information.
- **Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI)** stated that the pandemic and teacher unions led to prolonged school closures, which raised parental awareness. Parents recognized the harm caused by school closures and advocated for a quick return to in-person learning, as evidenced by the decline in student testing scores. Despite the low risks posed by COVID-19 to children, the CDC guidance was influenced by the American Federation of Teachers, potentially leading to unnecessary school closures affecting a significant number of students. Walberg asked if the CDC was wrong to give President Weingarten veto power over their guidance and if the teachers unions were wrong in discouraging schools from reopening.
 - Cardona responded that students needed to be in school and that schools should have reopened. He had no comments on Randi Weingarten's veto power over the CDC.
 - Walberg asked if the Department of Education had a role in advising the teachers unions on their public relations strategies. Cardona answered that the department does not have a role but does take communication seriously.
 - Walberg pointed out that in states where teachers' unions were strong, schools were slower to reopen despite low risks and available vaccines. Walberg asked why schools were slow to reopen. Cardona responded by acknowledging the importance of safely reopening schools and mentioned that the Department of Education provided guidance for schools to reopen.
 - **Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT)** highlighted the value of career and technical education in addressing the skills gap and filling job openings. He also discussed the increase in federal investment in career and technical education through the Federal Perkins grant program and the need to expand the curriculum to comprehensive high schools using the career-connected high school program. Courtney asked Cardona to speak on addressing opportunities in our that young people could benefit from.
 - Cardona responded that bipartisan collaboration is crucial to improve educational opportunities for students. He emphasized the need to move away from the exclusive focus on four-year colleges and provide more options, such as career pathways and employer-funded college education. He advocated for comprehensive high schools to offer career and college counseling, align their curriculum with industry needs, and ensure all students have access to such opportunities.
 - Courtney stated that the McCarthy debt limit bill would put an indiscriminate chainsaw into Perkins grants and career credit connected icicles which is what employers across the country do not want.
 - **Rep. Rick W. Allen (R-GA)** asked if canceling student loans will financially help Americans who never went to college.
 - Cardona responded that targeted debt relief plan will help prevent defaults and get people back on their feet.
 - Allen asked if canceling loans would help people who never attended college. Cardona responded that if we help people get back into repayment without falling into default, it will help them and their local economy.

- Allen asked if canceling student loans would reduce the amount that students will borrow. Cardona responded that this may be in reference to the income driver repayment plan.
- Allen asked if canceling student loans would reduce the amount colleges charge students. Cardona responded that in conjunction with accountability measures and efforts to make college more affordable, it is a working progress.
- Allen asked if the department was taking any action to change oversight protocol to ensure funds are being spent as intended. Cardona responded that they take fiscal responsibility very seriously and engage in processes to support states in using the funds to benefit students.
- Allen asked how Cardona will get the funds for the new career-connected high schools competitive grant program to rural areas that do not have the expertise to apply for these grants. Cardona responded that they have a rural community of practice and are engaging proactively with rural communities to ensure they have access to the grants.
- **Rep. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (D-CNMI)** expressed concerns about the potential consequences of a proposal that would result in borrowers losing access to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and stricter student loan forgiveness programs. He stated the proposal suggests reducing program budgets, including the TRIO program, which supports underserved students, by reverting to fiscal year 2022 funding levels, impacting various programs and education success. Sablan asked what this would mean for the administration on field programs and how students would enroll.
 - Cardona responded the reduction to 2022 levels would undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on major programming, particularly the TRIO programs, resulting in a \$262 million cut and the loss of services for nearly 200,000 students, denying them access to higher education.
 - Sablan asked if there is anything more that the department, students, teachers, or administrators could lose potentially lose. Cardona responded investing in schools is crucial for the well-being and success of students and should be viewed as a necessary defense mechanism to safeguard our future and economic growth. Implementing cuts to education funding, particularly in mental health support, would have severe consequences, depriving students of essential resources and exacerbating the youth mental health crisis.
- **Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT)** asked if it is possible to change the properties and reactions of organic chemistry based on belief or wishful thinking.
 - Cardona responded no.
 - Owens asked if it is possible to change the law of gravity based on equity, specifically mentioning the impact on black people. Cardona said he was unsure of the question.
 - Owens mentioned his athletic achievements and the biological factors that contribute to his abilities. He posed a hypothetical scenario where he transitions to being a woman and questions whether it would be fair for them to compete against Cardona's daughter. Cardona responded by saying that it is his responsibility to ensure equal access for all individuals.
 - Owens continued with a hypothetical scenario about using bathrooms and asked if it would be fair for him, as a transgender person, to enter the women's restroom. Cardona responded by saying that bathroom usage is not determined by the proposed regulations they are discussing.

- Owens said he is concerned about progressive policies hurting children and cites the lack of proficiency in math in Baltimore schools. He argued that parents, regardless of their income, would take any necessary steps to improve their children's education.
- **Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)** expressed concern about cuts that Republicans had voted for and stated that it would negatively affect student learning, harm students' mental health during the pandemic recovery, cut CTE programs, increase teacher stress, hinder access to college education, and reduce opportunities for marginalized students. Bonamici asked Cardona about Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act and how states and school districts were utilizing the funding to improve school safety and promote well-rounded education.
 - Cardona emphasized the importance of school safety and said there is a need for Title IV and Safer Communities Act funding to ensure access to mental health support and professional development for educators. Cardona committed to working with states and school districts to improve school safety using evidence-based practices and avoid overusing School Resource Officers (SROs).
 - Bonamici asked about the Department of Education's role in developing best practices and sharing them with educators, school leaders, and state leaders to address the effects of the pandemic on student learning and asked about the impact of budget cuts on education research and its ability to effectively address learning loss. Cardona responded by emphasizing the importance of learning from each other and creating conditions for shared learning and problem-solving but expressed concern that cutting funds for education research would limit the ability to engage partners and invest in evidence-based strategies.
- **Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI)** said that the federal student loan system was designed to encourage students to take out as many loans as they could without considering how much they would be able to repay, and the massive amount of loans students were borrowing affected their ability to have a family, buy a car, or own a home. Grothman asked if a student should take out more loans and whether they would be able to afford them comfortably.
 - Cardona acknowledged that the current system was broken and stated the responsibility to ensure that people shouldn't take out more loans than they could afford.
 - Grothman asked about the limitations imposed on financial aid advisors in counseling borrowers to borrow less when it was clear they were taking on too much debt. Cardona said they were communicating with universities about practices that restricted such counseling.
 - Grothman mentioned a bill he is working on and that it aimed to allow financial aid advisors to advise against taking out the maximum amount of loans and provide accurate information. Cardona agreed that counselors should be able to offer accurate information, including advising against large loans.
 - Grothman asked how it could be called a repayment plan when a significant percentage of undergraduates would not pay back their loans. Cardona responded that it aimed to open access to college and ensure debt payment based on income. As income increases, debt payments would also increase. The goal was to remove cost as a barrier to higher education and tap into untapped talent in the country.
 - Grothman asked if the lack of diversity in thought at universities bothered Cardona. Cardona expressed concern about attacks on diversity, suggesting it may be referring to the attacks on diversity and inclusion (DEI) efforts.
- **Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA)** expressed gratitude and mentioned their mother's success without a college degree but highlighted the importance of going to college and shared concerns about

the rising cost of higher education. Takano mentioned the decrease in state subsidies for public higher education and the presence of bad actors in the system. Takano asked about the congressional intent behind the incentive compensation ban in the Higher Education Act.

- Cardona explained that the incentive compensation ban aimed to prevent colleges from engaging in unscrupulous behavior, particularly related to third-party services targeting students for lower-quality programs.
- Takano asked about specific behaviors Congress sought to curb. Cardona acknowledged that some of the behaviors targeted by the ban were those of third-party services profiting from or directing students to subpar programs.
- Takano asked if Cardona was familiar with online program managers (OPMs) and the criticism they faced for potentially circumventing the intent of the incentive compensation ban. Cardona acknowledged awareness of OPMs and emphasized the need for higher education institutions to adapt to student demands while ensuring proper oversight.
- Takano brought up that online program managers were misleading students by marketing online programs as equivalent to on-campus programs, leading to debt-financed enrollment and misrepresentation of program value. Cardona stated that rulemaking was underway to address these concerns while allowing colleges to explore partnerships that meet online needs and student preferences.
- **Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN)** discussed a proposed rule incentivizing public schools to incorporate critical race theory in US history and civics classes. The rule cited Ibram X. Kendi's work and the 1619 project as examples of the ideas the department would promote. Just three months later, the department backtracked on the plan and released a watered-down updated guidance that didn't mention Ibram X. Kendi or the 1619 project. Banks asked Cardona why the department removed references to Ibram X. Kendi and the 1619 project in its updated guidance.
 - Cardona responded that decisions around curricular materials were best left to local districts.
 - Banks asked if they removed the guidance telling teachers and schools to teach about Ibram X. Kendi and the 1619 project because they ultimately decided it was inappropriate for children. Cardona replied that the federal government does not have a role in curriculum.
 - Banks asked if it was appropriate for Ibram X. Kendi to call Justice Amy Coney Barrett a white colonizer and whether teaching such ideas to children was appropriate. Cardona said the question is for the author.
 - Banks asked if the department believed capitalism was essentially racist. Cardona tried to steer the conversation away, stating it was a divisive topic and time could be used for other matters.
 - Banks expressed a desire to work together but criticized the initial proposal to teach what he called garbage to children, suggesting that the department backtracked because it realized it was inappropriate.
 - Banks mentioned the low civics and history scores of US students and suggested that the administration's divisive approach to education was one reason for the poor results.
 - Banks discussed a law passed in Indiana that banned biological males from competing against girls in sports and asked if the education department's proposed change would result in pulling federal funding from schools that enforced this policy, potentially affecting school lunch programs for needy kids. Cardona did not directly answer the question but redirected the conversation to talk about academic programming and raising the bar.

- Banks asked if the administration supported taking away school lunches from needy kids because of a school's policy on boys competing in girls' sports. Cardona responded that he is proud of the work they are doing.
- **Rep. Alma S. Adams (D-NC)** mentioned three letters that were entered into the record, one from UNCF, one from the American Council of Education, and another from Spelman College. The letters addressed concerns and issues related to the services they wanted to continue. Adams discussed the previous year's achievement of securing significant wins for minority-serving institutions and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the federal omnibus. Adams asked Cardona to comment on the importance of investing in research and development (R&D) infrastructure programs at schools.
 - Cardona acknowledged the importance of investing in R&D at these institutions, citing its critical role in their growth, access to grants and contracts, and addressing historic underinvestment. Cardona mentioned that HBCUs have taken advantage of the funding to improve facilities and enhance student access to laboratories.
 - Adams asked if Cardona had consulted with UNCF experts regarding competition between HBCUs with other respected resource institutions. Cardona confirmed regular conversations with UNCF and others regarding the unique needs of HBCUs.
 - Adams asked about the Department of Education's analysis of the impact and potential changes to the guidance on third-party service or oversight. Cardona acknowledged the various perspectives on the matter and expressed the need for thoughtful consideration. Cardona emphasized the importance of oversight to ensure students receive value and a good return on their educational investment.
- **Rep. Bob Good (R-VA)** said one year ago, Cardona was asked for an update on the implementation of AG Garland's October 2021 memo to the FBI and if Cardona had since received an update on the implementation of AG Garland's memo directing the FBI to investigate parents. Cardona was asked about the nature of the update he had received and his understanding of the status of the FBI's efforts to investigate parents at school board meetings.
 - Cardona that there was no update on anything regarding the memo and no involvement in the NSBA letter from the Department of Education. He emphasized that they strongly support engaging with families and parents, especially at the board level.
 - Good asked if Cardona supported the memo's directive to target parents who expressed their concerns at school board meetings. Cardona stated that his focus in 2023 was ensuring school boards had enough funding.
 - Good asked again if he supported the memo's targeting of parents. Cardona expressed complete confidence in the Department of Justice and their right to do what they feel is necessary.
 - Good asked if Cardona had done anything to protect the First Amendment rights of parents who express their concerns at school board meetings without fear of threat. Cardona responded that they regularly communicate with stakeholders, including parents and board officials, about the importance of engaging parents.
 - Good asked if it was appropriate for smear comments to be directed at parents. Cardona responded that parents have the right to communicate and be present at board meetings, and he supported parents in expressing their thoughts and concerns.
- **Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA)** expressed surprise at the concern shown by a Republican colleague from Indiana, Mr. Banks, regarding school lunches. Jayapal reminded the committee and viewers that 42 Republicans, including Mr. Banks, had voted against providing school lunches last year. Jayapal discussed the affordability crisis in higher education and highlighted President Biden's student debt relief plan. Jayapal criticized Republican colleagues for wanting

to stop the plan and mentioned a recent disapproval resolution advanced by Republicans in the committee. Jayapal asked about the benefits of debt relief for older and retired Americans.

- Cardona confirmed that older individuals with debt would also benefit and mentioned that a quarter of federal student debt belonged to older Americans.
- Jayapal highlighted the challenges faced by rural borrowers, including delinquency and default rates. Cardona acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on rural communities, particularly due to limited access to broadband, and said that debt relief would help these communities recover.
- Jayapal criticized Republican colleagues for opposing the administration's debt cancellation plan while benefiting from PPP loan forgiveness and requested to enter a list of Republican members of Congress whose PPP loans were forgiven into the record. Jayapal pointed out the hypocrisy of opposing relief while benefiting from financial support. The request was accepted.
- Jayapal asked how debt cancellation would help borrowers before repayments resumed. Cardona explained that debt cancellation would relieve around 20 million borrowers from their debts, preventing defaults and ensuring they were not worse off due to the pandemic.
- Jayapal raised concerns about a resolution advanced by Republicans in the committee that aimed to block relief and retroactively end the payment pause. Jayapal asked about the feasibility of services to prevent borrowers from defaulting if the resolution were to pass. Cardona stated that the likelihood of default would significantly increase if the resolution were implemented.
- Jayapal asked about the time it would take for the department to issue a pause in the future if they had to follow the rulemaking process. Cardona explained that going through the rulemaking process would cause significant delays and result in many borrowers defaulting.
- **Rep. Lisa C. McClain (R-MI)** expressed concern about the Department of Education acting unilaterally to forgive student debt using the borrower defense program and emphasized the need for data before discussing opinions. McClain asked Cardona if they knew or could provide information on the number of approved policy claims under the loan discharge program.
 - Cardona offered to have their staff reach out with specific information about borrower defense actions.
 - McClain requested data on the number of career colleges with approved claims, and Cardona agreed to follow up.
 - McClain mentioned numerous FOIA requests by private organizations and institutions seeking information on the claims, which had not yet been fulfilled. McClain asked if the department had been processing and responding to these requests. Cardona responded affirmatively, stating that the Department of Education is committed to providing information and taking oversight seriously.
 - McClain asked about the department's number of employees and budget, which Cardona estimated to be just under 4000 employees.
- **Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA)** expressed concern about reports of harassment of voters at polling places and the negative impact of false claims on public education. She encouraged parents to get involved in their children's schools. Wild asked Cardona about the benefits of providing affordable or free community college education to society at large.
 - Cardona supported community colleges and highlighted their economic benefits and importance in preparing the next generation's workforce.

- Wild agreed with Cardona and expressed commitment to seeing community college education accessible to everyone.
- **Rep. Mary E. Miller (R-IL)** claimed the Biden administration believed daughters should be forced to compete against biological men in high school sports.
 - Cardona responded that the proposed Title IX proposals aimed to ensure equal opportunities for all students without discrimination and mentioned that blanket bans were not allowed, and emphasized the importance of local input in the decision-making process.
 - Miller argued that allowing men in girls' athletics would cancel these opportunities and potentially lead to injuries.
 - Miller asked whether the Biden administration thought it was appropriate to allow biological males in girls' bathrooms, showers, and locker rooms. Cardona stated that the proposed rulemaking process focused on athletic team eligibility and not on bathrooms, which were decisions made by local boards.
 - Miller criticized the administration's guidance on bathroom policies and mentioned lawsuits filed by multiple states and demanded a clear answer on whether biological males should be allowed in girls' locker rooms and showers, referencing previous unequivocal statements made under the Trump administration. Cardona reiterated their support for separate showers for boys and girls but emphasized the importance of ensuring all students feel safe and welcome in school.
 - Miller brought up cases of assault and trauma caused by the presence of biological men in girls' facilities, highlighting concerns and opposition to Cardona and the administration.
- **Rep. Lucy McBath (D-GA)** McBath asked about the economic significance of Pell Grants and the negative impact of the proposed cuts on working families.
 - Cardona explained that Pell Grants leveled the playing field for students based on their ability, not their wealth. They mentioned how Pell Grants opened doors to higher education, changed life trajectories, and allowed for maximizing talent in schools.
- **Rep. Michelle Steel (R-CA)** asked about protecting sensitive research from foreign adversaries and expressed concerns about the influence of the CCP on college campuses, and proposed legislation to address the issue.
 - Cardona agreed with the importance of protecting intellectual property and reducing foreign influence on campuses. They mentioned improvements in transparency and accountability under Section 117 and efforts to ensure compliance with reporting requirements.
 - McBath asked if Cardona would commit to visiting charter schools before the end of the year, highlighting their success and the different learning experiences they offered. Cardona expressed support for charter schools and acknowledged their importance in meeting specific needs, and committed to visiting a charter school.
- **Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT)** expressed their intention to shift the focus to early childhood education and the Headstart program, which they considered one of the greatest anti-poverty initiatives in American history. Hayes asked Cardona about the department's policies to improve access to pre-K for children.
 - Cardona responded by acknowledging the importance of early childhood experiences and the impact they have on students' academic progress. He mentioned the budget proposal to allocate nearly half a billion dollars to expand preschool and early childhood experiences. Cardona emphasized the need to collaborate with the Department of

Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure a cohesive approach to early childhood education, connecting it to the K-12 system.

- Hayes referred to a previous statement during the committee hearing and requested Cardona's response. Cardona acknowledged that such comments were divisive and called for collaboration. He emphasized the primary importance of student safety and the need to accept and acknowledge students for who they are.
- **Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL)** discussed the importance of raising the bar in education and empowering parents and students through school choice. Bean asked how to promote parental choice.
 - Cardona responded that there is a need for parents to have decision-making power and mentioned funding for public charter schools. He opposed diverting funds from public schools to private school vouchers due to potential negative effects on the public school system.
 - Hayes asked about struggling schools and the urgency of addressing their issues. Cardona responded acknowledging the need for urgent action and mentioning strategies taken to allocate funds for reopening schools.
 - Hayes raised concerns about proprietary colleges facing difficulties and potential closures. Cardona acknowledged the importance of proprietary colleges but highlights the need to protect students from predatory practices.
 - Hayes asked about the national debt and suggested the need for budget cuts. Cardona responded with the importance of investing in education for the country's economic prosperity.
- **Rep. Haley M. Stevens (D-MI)** recognized the importance of public schools, especially for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), as they often attended these schools. Stevens recalled previous discussions on how COVID-19 had adversely affected students with learning disabilities and asked how the Department of Education was working to ensure that schools provided students with disabilities the necessary services and support to help.
 - Cardona responded that students with disabilities were significantly impacted by the pandemic, possibly more than any other group. He received letters from parents indicating that their children had regressed due to unmet IEPs. The department provided specific guidance for students with disabilities and even investigated cases through the Office for Civil Rights to ensure districts fulfilled their legal responsibilities. They had taken this matter seriously and, for the first time, issued guidance on providing mental health support to students, considering it crucial for their success.
 - Stevens asked about the department's efforts to support states and school districts in strengthening and diversifying their educator workforce and addressing the pre-pandemic teacher shortage. Cardona discussed Congress's commitment to allocate 40 percent of IDA funds for special education. He emphasized the importance of diversity among professional staff and mentioned the Augusta Hawkins grant, created to provide pathways for diverse candidates into the teaching profession.
- **Rep. Eric Burlison (R-MO)** expressed concerns about the impact of foreign entities, especially China, on our higher education institutions. Burlison asked if Cardona shared those concerns. T
 - Cardona responded in the affirmative and emphasized the seriousness of foreign threats and the need to protect university intellectual property.
 - Burlison said the administration used to release information on requests made by universities regarding foreign donors but the current administration has chosen not to make the same information public. Burlison asked why the change occurred. Cardona

said the current administration is on track to surpass any other administration after the previous administration had altered the process.

- Burlison submitted a letter from Representative Lance Gooden (R-TX) to Cardona. Burlison asked if there were comments on the letter. Cardona emphasized the ongoing engagement with members of the hill and the commitment to be responsive to the letter.
- Burlison said points outlined in Representative Gooden's letter were related to changes in the agency that no longer included information on foreign gifts and contracts sent to schools. Cardona referred to the previous administration's lack of investigation and reiterated the commitment to respond to letters and ensure compliance.
- Burlison asked about the School Board Association letter dated 2021 to President Biden and if there was awareness or collaboration with the School Board Association regarding the letter. Cardona denied any involvement with the letter.
- **Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM)** expressed their belief that the majority should act on an assault weapon ban to decrease the number and severity of school shootings.
 - Cardona agreed with the statement.
 - Fernandez proposed the Financial Fitness Act, which would establish a personal finance education portal accessible to students and parents. Fernandez asked Cardona to commit to working on this initiative. Cardona expressed enthusiasm and stated that improving financial literacy was part of their strategy to enhance programming in schools.
 - Fernandez stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of young students while they learn. Fernandez called for collective action and unity to prioritize student safety. Cardona agreed with the need to come together and expressed optimism about conversations with the community.
 - Fernandez asked Cardona to discuss the need for two years of free community college and its impact on students and their families. Cardona highlighted the economic mobility it would provide and the importance of education in obtaining higher-paying jobs and contributing to the economy.
 - Fernandez expressed concern about McCarthy's Default in America Act and the potentially detrimental effects it could have on education funding.
- **Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA)** discussed an article from Politico that was published on September 23, 2021, stating that the Education Secretary supported mandatory school COVID-19 vaccines.
 - Cardona confirmed that the Biden administration favored student vaccine mandates. Cardona explained that it was the recommendation of health officials at the federal, state, and local levels to have students vaccinated.
 - Kiley asked about mask mandates for young children. Cardona denied fabricating or mischaracterizing scientific evidence to support them. Cardona stated that they led the country in reopening schools and implemented common-sense mitigation strategies based on scientific advice.
 - Kiley asked about criticizing governors who opposed mask mandates. Cardona explained that they believed decisions regarding mask mandates should be made by superintendents and health officials, not state governors. They wanted health experts to have a voice in these decisions and felt it was important to communicate that.
 - Kiley asked whether Cardona criticized governors who did not open schools. In response, Cardona asked for clarification on a chart depicting in-person instruction and acknowledged providing guidance on reopening schools regardless of the governors' political affiliation.

- Kiley asked if Cardona criticized the governors of certain states. Cardona pointed out that they were critical of governors who removed superintendents and hindered the protection of students and families.
- Kiley said Cardona and the administration were complicit in a significant policy failure regarding school reopening.
- **Rep. Kathy E. Manning (D-NC)** mentioned raising mental health awareness by introducing the Mental Health in Schools Act, a bipartisan bill that aimed to add awareness education to existing school wellness policies and increase resources for mental health providers in schools. Manning asked about the plan for allocating funds to increase providers in schools and efforts to improve counselor-to-student ratios.
 - Cardona responded with the importance of supporting students' mental health needs and mentioned providing guidance, certifications, and collaborations with higher education institutions and community-based health centers. Cardona highlighted partnerships with schools, hospitals, and boys' and girls' clubs to offer comprehensive mental health support, including proactive tier one supports, additional counselors and social workers, and external community partners.
 - Manning mentioned a discussion with Assistant Secretary Catherine Lamont regarding the backlog of civil rights complaints and the need for more staff to process and investigate them. Manning asked about addressing the backlog and prioritizing complaints. Cardona confirmed that additional funding would result in more staff to investigate cases.
 - Manning asked to ensure that the Biden Administration's commitment extended to protecting all students, including Jewish and pro-Israel students. Cardona responded affirmatively, stating that they were indeed committed to ensuring the protection of all students.
- **Rep. Nathaniel Moran (R-TX)** asked about the language of the recently passed Parents Bill of Rights.
 - Cardona expressed the belief in parental engagement but disagreed with the bill, stating that it would give too much oversight to the federal government, limiting the decision-making power of local boards.
 - Moran asked whether Cardona's vision was for local boards to have the authority to make decisions for their school districts. Cardona affirmed that local boards should have that responsibility as they know their districts best.
 - Moran expressed confusion about the tendency to push education to the federal level and impose more mandates and asked what Cardona had done as Secretary of Education to give more authority to parents and local school districts. Cardona responded by emphasizing that they had the same values as a teacher and principal, preferring decisions to be made locally.
 - Moran asked if grants, funding, and protecting the civil rights of students were the primary roles of the federal government in education. Cardona confirmed this and stated that sometimes states needed support and guidance to carry out this work successfully.
 - Moran asked if Cardona agreed that a representative from East Texas would not know local school districts in California or New York as well as those who are familiar with their own districts. Cardona agreed with this statement, acknowledging that familiarity with districts varied depending on one's location.

- Moran emphasized that they knew East Texas better than representatives from California, New York, or even Republican districts, and Cardona agreed with their assertion.
- **Rep. Frederica S. Wilson (D-FL)** expressed concern about the impact of budget cuts on the federal student loan repayment program and emphasized the need to cancel student debt and increase federal assistance. Wilson asked for elaboration on the Education Department's commitment to addressing the teacher shortage through existing federal programs.
 - Cardona stated that the teacher shortage was a teacher respect issue and emphasized the need to honor teachers. Cardona stressed the importance of working conditions, mental health support for students, professional development opportunities for teachers, and competitive salaries and highlighted the pay disparity and the need to support educators beyond Teacher Appreciation Week. Cardona suggested investing in pathway and apprenticeship programs to address the recruitment challenges in teaching and expressed commitment to this cause.
- **Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR)** questioned what would happen when students graduate without the necessary reading and writing skills to succeed post-graduation.
 - Cardona acknowledged the importance of basic literacy and numeracy for students to succeed in their careers and education.
 - Chavez asked whether it is beneficial for students to lower the standards and not require these basic skills for graduation. Cardona emphasized the need to raise the bar and improve student performance, focusing on academic rigor, high standards, and comprehensive education.
 - Chavez suggested that teachers should show deference to parents. Cardona agreed that teachers and parents should work closely together, even outside of issue-based interactions.
 - Chavez asked about transparency between teachers and parents regarding bullying or drastic changes in behavior, and Cardona responded indicating that ongoing communication channels should already be in place.
 - Chavez asked about increasing Pell Grant eligibility for short-term programs that equip students with the necessary skills for technical careers. Cardona expressed interest in expanding Pell Grants to cover such programs with increased accountability.
 - Chavez asked if Cardona would commit to working with the committee on the area, to which Cardona responded affirmatively, expressing willingness to collaborate.
- **Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY)** highlighted the detrimental effects of budget cuts on arts, music, and sports programs, affecting not only urban black and brown kids but also rural white kids. Bowman criticized the proposed cuts to SNAP benefits and Title I schools, which would harm vulnerable communities. Bowman asked Cardona to address the impact of these cuts on the school-to-prison pipeline and discuss the role of community schools in addressing this issue.
 - Cardona responded by saying that it costs more to incarcerate than to educate and emphasized the need to invest in children and the country.
- **Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA)** mentioned the bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the Mental Health Matters Act, acknowledging the success of the former and the challenges faced by the latter in the Senate. DeSaulnier shared a meeting they had with individuals burdened by student debt from a mental health institute and posed two questions regarding the successes of the Safer Communities Act and how to address the dilemma of increasing demand while lacking a sufficient workforce.
 - Cardona expressed optimism and agreed that career pathways and mental health support for students are necessary. Cardona emphasized the bipartisan nature of the

Safer Communities Act and the funding it provides to double the number of social workers and counselors in schools. Regarding the shortage of mental health professionals, Cardona suggested thinking outside the box and creating pathway programs to engage high school students and collaborate with higher education institutions.

- **Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN)** mentioned measures in some states that would make it difficult for many children to feel part of a community and receive the necessary education to succeed. Omar wanted to know what the Department of Education was doing to counter these challenges, particularly mentioning proposed insulation in Florida and Texas, as well as legislation inquiring about young women's administration information.
 - Cardona acknowledged the targeting of students who need support and the importance of making them feel welcome and accepted.
 - Omar asked if legislation was needed for the Department to push back against these issues. Cardona confirmed that legislation would be helpful, but they had already provided fact sheets and documents on educators' and education leaders' rights and responsibilities.
 - Omar commended the administration on the debt relief implementation and inquired about updates and the Department's resources to carry it out effectively. Cardona expressed excitement about the debt relief and anticipated a positive decision from the Supreme Court. They assured readiness and responsiveness from the Student Aid Office and acknowledged the potential impact of the budget proposal on their ability to serve borrowers and students eligible for FAFSA.
- **Rep. James Comer (R-KY)** stated that they had read several correspondences over the last few months, both as a member of the House Education Committee and as the chairman of the House Oversight Committee. The most recent correspondence was a joint request for additional information regarding the Department's plan to allow borrowers to self-certify their income for income-driven repayment plans. Comer stated concerns about fraudulent reporting due to self-certification of income. Comer asked if a briefing could be scheduled by the end of the week.
 - Cardona stated that their team was actively engaged in improving the reporting of income and working towards obtaining accurate information directly from the IRS to reduce paperwork.
 - Comer requested a briefing on the implementation of the income certification process, acknowledging the importance of addressing potential fraud in the federal government. Cardona stated the importance of commitment to addressing the issue seriously and agreed on the need for careful use of every dollar and assured communication and responsive engagement.
 - Comer brought up Section 117 of the Higher Education Act, which required higher education institutions to disclose gifts or contracts from foreign sources valued above \$150,000, and mentioned that China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar had given more than \$11 billion in gifts and contracts to US higher education. Comer raised concerns about the Office of Federal Student Aid taking over enforcement activities related to potential violations of Section 117, considering the office's lack of experience in such disclosures and its lower staffing levels. Comer asked about the department's steps in transitioning enforcement from the Office of General Counsel to the Office of Federal Student Loan Aid. Cardona responded by assuring Congress the department's commitment to addressing foreign threats seriously