

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Every Student Counts Act. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act with broad bipartisan support. The purpose of No Child Left Behind was to ensure that every student in America could receive a quality education, and over the past 6 years, NCLB has helped shed light on many issues facing our education system today.

However, NCLB has not been without flaw. Certain aspects of the law are difficult to implement or are not having the results that we had hoped for. One of the major shortcomings of NCLB is the law's failure to hold schools accountable for dropouts. Although we believed we addressed this issue in the original NCLB legislation, this portion of the law has not been implemented as we had hoped. Instead, under current law, the only meaningful accountability standard for high schools is students' scores on assessments, not how many students graduate or drop out of school. Unfortunately, this myopic accountability standard has created an incentive for high schools to push out students who are struggling academically, so that their tests scores are not counted in the assessments. Furthermore, the current accountability system also has allowed states to report graduation rates inconsistently and in misleading ways. Finally, NCLB does not require the disaggregation of graduation rates by subgroup, leading to incomplete data on how our schools are doing with all students.

This current high school accountability system is failing both our students and our Nation. Almost one-third of all high school students in the United States fail to graduate with their peers--about 1.2 million every year. In Virginia alone, each year nearly 24,000 students do not graduate with their peers. But the numbers are worse for minorities--only about 50 percent of African American students and 60 percent of Hispanic students graduate on time with a regular diploma, compared to 75 percent of whites.

These numbers only show the tip of the iceberg. Research shows that each dropout, over his or her lifetime, costs the Nation approximately \$260,000. At the current rate, more than 12 million students will drop out over the next decade resulting in a loss to the nation of \$3 trillion. Statistics also show that high school dropouts are more likely to be on public assistance programs--such as welfare--than students who complete high school. If high school dropouts do find employment, they are much more likely to work at unskilled jobs that offer little opportunity for upward mobility or promotions. Indeed, the median earnings of high school dropouts remain between \$20,000 and \$30,000 throughout their lives with little increase as they get older. Unfortunately, there is also a relationship between high school dropouts and prison; one estimate states that approximately two-thirds of all prisoners are high school dropouts. In one

study in my home state of Virginia, 75 percent of the inmates serving life sentences were found to have reading achievement levels of 4th grade or worse.

Madam Speaker, the large number of dropouts in America's school system is also troubling in terms of America's position in the global economy. The globalization of the marketplace has altered the way the United States and other countries have to compete for business. With the rapid development of the global marketplace, the United States is no longer the single dominant country in the world economy. And in this economy, one of the major competitive advantages we have in America is our advantage in education. We certainly can't compete with other countries with lower wages when many around the world may work for a few dollars or even pennies a day. Nor can we compete in terms of location. Products can be made anywhere and shipped to customers anywhere else overnight. The technology of today--fax machines, cell phones, blackberries and wireless Internet--allows any worker who can work across the hall to work across the globe. One of the main reasons businesses still want to locate in America is because we have well-educated workers. Because of this need for well-educated workers to keep our country competitive, we can't allow--or afford--people to drop out and not reach their full potential.

I am therefore introducing the Every Student Counts Act to bring meaningful accountability to high schools for America's dropout crisis. The legislation builds on the National Governors Association's Graduation Rate Compact, which was signed by all 50 of the Nation's governors in 2005. It would ensure that schools are held accountable for graduating students by creating a single, accurate, and consistent measurement for reporting and accountability of high school graduation rates. The Every Student Counts Act would require high schools to increase their graduation rates by meeting annual, research-based benchmarks with the long-term goal of reaching a 90 percent graduation rate. The bill would also require the disaggregation of graduation data by subgroup to ensure that schools are held accountable for increasing the graduation rate for all of our students. Finally, the bill would give schools credit for graduating students who need extra time by allowing students who graduate in 5 years to count toward a school's successful graduation rates.

It is my hope that with this bill, we can make great strides toward graduating more of America's students and preparing them to succeed in college and in life. I would like to thank *Rubén Hinojosa*, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness and an original cosponsor of this bill, for his support. I encourage my colleagues to become cosponsors of this critical legislation and hope that we will see it become law during the 110th Congress.