

OPENING STATEMENT
THE HONORABLE RALPH HALL (R-TX), Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology
Reform in K-12 STEM Education
Thursday, March 4, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing today. It is good for us to be able to hear from such a distinguished group on what role each of their organizations play in improving K-12 STEM education, particularly as we move forward on reauthorizing the America COMPETES Act.

We have a difficult task in front of us with this forthcoming legislation. On the one hand, we know that making the appropriate investments in research, development, technology, and math and science education – including educating, motivating, and inspiring our children about STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects at an early age - are essential to our future economic prosperity. This country has long been the leader in innovation, and I have no doubt that we will continue to be so. At the same time, we are faced with the blunt reality that we must strike a delicate balance between adequately funding our nation’s priorities while at the same time exhibiting fiscal restraint to reduce our ever increasing deficit.

In the last COMPETES bill, we made great strides to improve K-12 STEM education in this country. As such, I believe we need to give those programs time to succeed before creating new ones. I am pleased to see that the President is trying to get the Department of Education to focus more on STEM programs, but I am concerned that the National Science Foundation’s unique and critical role in K-12 has been somewhat diminished in the FY11 budget request. It is not so much the case that we need to “reform” K-12 STEM education by continuing to seek new and innovative ways to capture our students’ attention as this Nation is full of good, solid examples of teachers, schools, and communities that are getting it right. (*The Martha and Josh Morriss Mathematics and Engineering Elementary School in Texarkana, TX, is just one of those schools. I know, Mr. Chairman, that I mention it often, but you have been to that school with me and know just how innovative and successful it is – a true collaboration between the school district, the local university, industry and the willingness of the community to embrace it.*) Rather, we need to be able to figure out a better way to share these successful programs, the tools they use, and the various entities that came together to create them so that they can be replicated across the country, without being heavy-handed on the federal end. I know one size does not fit all, but there are many, good programs out there already in existence.

I bet we are getting ready to hear about a few more, so with that, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony. I yield back the balance of my time.