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**Opening Statement**  
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Thank you for this opportunity to speak, Mr. Chairman.

Today, I am here as a member of the National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, composed of leading researchers, practitioners, policy experts, and funders who are committed to effective family engagement.

First, I want to dispel forever the misconception that family engagement is a soft and squishy issue, without hard data to back it up. I've been tracking the research and effective practice for over 30 years, and I can assure you that engaging low-income families will raise student achievement, lower the dropout rate, and help close the achievement gap.

We measure the effectiveness of family engagement not by the number of parents at back-to-school nights, but by its impact on student achievement. For example, the collaboration between Austin Interfaith, a family and community organizing group, and the Austin Independent School District, turned around several struggling schools. In schools with intensive involvement in the initiative, the number of students passing the state test went up almost 20 percent.

Yet despite the strong evidence, family engagement is still a low priority, and schools are struggling to reach families. Instead of committing what we call random acts of parent involvement, we MUST scale up innovative, research-based approaches that engage families in meaningful ways to improve achievement and turn around failing schools.

I am old enough to remember the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. It was part of the War on Poverty, and the watchword was "maximum feasible participation." We must continue and strengthen this commitment to families and children. Children spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school, and if we hope to close the achievement gap, we must engage their parents.

To make sure that family engagement remains a cornerstone of the law, I offer four recommendations:

1. Move away from rigid compliance to provide incentives to schools, districts, and state education agencies to implement proven approaches through both a mandatory set-aside and competitive grants.
2. Build the capacity of schools, districts, and state agencies to engage families from early childhood through college graduation. One way to do this is to strengthen the Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), the sole program dedicated to engaging families in the education of their children. There is at least one PIRC in every state and territory.

3. Provide professional development to teachers and school leaders on effective ways to engage families in improving student achievement. According to the Met Life survey of 2005, teachers say that working with families is their #1 challenge, the area where they feel least well prepared and least satisfied.

4. Finally, invest in rigorous research that identifies best practices in family engagement to ensure that this work is effective, sustainable, and scalable.

In closing, I would like to say that without parents on board, the whole child will be left behind.