

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
*Hearing on STEM Education: The Administration's Proposed
Reorganization*
June 4, 2013

Opening Statement
By
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson

Thank you, Chairman Smith, for holding this hearing, and thank you to our distinguished witnesses for taking the time to appear before the Committee this afternoon.

Improving STEM education in the United States has been a major focus of mine since I came to Congress, and I am happy to see the increased focus on STEM education across the nation. States, universities, companies, and nonprofits are working together in unprecedented ways to improve STEM education at all levels.

We have also increased our efforts at the Federal level, in both Congress and our agencies, to improve the effectiveness of our STEM education investments. In the 2010 COMPETES Reauthorization, this Committee required OSTP to form an interagency Committee, which became known as CoSTEM, to coordinate federal STEM programs on an ongoing basis and develop a five-year strategic plan for federal investments in STEM education.

I was very supportive of this mandate because I believed it was important to look at what the Federal government has been doing and how we can improve our efforts. I appreciate all of the hard work that federal education leaders, especially Mr. Melvin and Dr. Ferrini-Mundy, have put into developing a STEM education strategic plan.

Unfortunately, prior to the release of the CoSTEM strategic plan, OMB included a proposal in the President's FY14 Budget for a sweeping reorganization of Federal STEM education programs. In addition to being concerned about the process, I have serious concerns with the budget proposal itself. To be blunt, it seems to me it was not very well thought out.

While I have many questions and concerns, one point I want to emphasize here is the important role of NASA in supporting outreach activities and informal STEM education. NASA seems to have taken the biggest hit in the budget proposal and this doesn't make any sense to me.

I have visited many classrooms in my home state of Texas and I can tell you there is nothing that can replace the excitement for kids of hearing directly from a NASA astronaut or visiting a NASA facility.

Since the 1960s, NASA has been key in encouraging students to study science and engineering, and I hope we don't do anything to compromise this.

That's just the beginning of my own concerns, and I'm sure my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will have many questions about both the process and the specifics of the budget proposal.

But in the end, all of us today share the same goal of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of federal investments in STEM education. We've been investing a lot of money in many programs over many years, and while there are many positive anecdotes and some programs that have been evaluated rigorously, we are falling much too short on evidence and accountability.

This also applies to the programs to increase participation in STEM by females and underrepresented minorities. It's not enough just to fund these programs, we need to ensure that they are effective.

Therefore, I hope we can use this hearing for more than just attacking the FY14 budget proposal. The 5-year strategic plan that we just received on Friday after much delay is a separate document, and hopefully one that stands on its own and remains viable even if Congress refuses to support the specifics of the FY14 proposal. My hope is that the CoSTEM strategic plan can serve as a new starting point for more sensible and well-thought out implementation steps in FY15 and beyond and I look forward to discussing this further with the panel today.

It is our responsibility on this Committee to work with the agencies and the stakeholder groups to make sure the CoSTEM process we required in COMPETES is successful.

I want to thank Chairman Smith again for calling this hearing, and the witnesses as well for being here. I look forward to your testimony and a productive discussion.