

Opening Statement of Roberto Rodriguez
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development,
U.S. Department of Education
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
July 13, 2021

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Before I begin, it's a pleasure to introduce my wife, Rocío, and my children, Isabela and Roberto Andrés to the Committee. They are my pride, joy, and constant source of support.

I am honored by the trust that President Biden and Vice President Harris have placed in me with this nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development at the Department of Education.

If confirmed, I will bring steadfast commitment and a sense of duty to the Department that have been the hallmark of my public service.

Educational equity and opportunity stand as guiding principles in my own career. I learned from an early age of the value of education from my parents, and from my grandparents who came to our country with the strong belief that education and hard work are pathways to a better life. As the son of educators growing up in public education, I learned the importance of service, community, and opening doors for those whose voices are seldom heard. As Cesar Chavez said of education, "... our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sake and for our own."

Our collective charge of providing all children an excellent education – from the earliest years through workforce readiness and college success – is one that involves us all. It calls us to listen to one another and build common ground as policymakers, educators, community members, and parents, working together to get things done for students. It requires us to remove barriers to opportunity and address inequities in our system. Education policy is an important tool to advance these principles. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with Secretary Cardona, with President Biden and his staff, and with each of you to meet this charge.

Equal access and educational excellence are at the heart of the Department's mission. There has never been a more important time to fulfill that mission as we recover from this pandemic and look forward to a better future.

This pandemic has posed great hardships and tested our resolve. It has also revealed resilience and ingenuity among teachers, parents and students. The Department plays an important role in harnessing the innovations, ideas and best practices that emerged during this challenging year. If confirmed, I will commit to promoting communication and awareness to foster shared learning of those lessons as well as accountability for meeting the requirements set forth by Congress under the American Rescue Plan. I will also fulfill the other duties of this position, including

developing and reviewing the Department's budget and utilizing data to inform the Department's programs.

I bring commitment, experience, and an affinity for public policy to these responsibilities.

- Early in my career working at a national civil rights organization, I led a coalition of over 20 organizations to author policy recommendations and advocate at the federal level to address the needs of Latino and emergent bilingual learners;
- As Senator Kennedy's education counsel on this esteemed committee, I worked to build common ground and shared purpose to forge bipartisan agreement on federal policy, from No Child Left Behind to the Higher Education Opportunity Act;
- And on the White House Domestic Policy Council, I worked to build, promote and advance President Obama's cradle-through-career education agenda, crafting interagency efforts to improve outcomes for youth and adults.

More recently, I've had the privilege of working with hundreds of exceptional educators across the country, helping to bring their voices and vision to systems change. Leading this teacher leadership movement inspired me to connect the expertise and experience of educators to policymaking. Working across diverse states and communities – geographically and politically – also taught me about the importance of shaping policy in a manner responsive to local needs. Those diverse perspectives can yield stronger solutions across rural, urban, and tribal communities – in red states and in blue states.

I worked to bring teachers into the policy conversation because I know effective policy is a tool that can help us respond to challenges while also inspiring us to envision something better. Effective policy is solutions-oriented – it focuses on the assets and aspirations of our students and families. Effective policy should emerge from robust evidence and knowledge about what works best to support teaching and learning.

If confirmed, you have my commitment to bring a holistic, bottom-up and inclusive approach to education policymaking; to promote innovation and a learning culture that will complement, inform and guide policy and program implementation; and to pursue the strategic use of data in ways that are open, transparent and actionable for the benefit of educators, families, students and borrowers.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my background and priorities. I am eager to get to work and look forward to learning about your interests and answering your questions.