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Taking into account everything happening right now, between the economy, high unemployment and debt-ceiling negotiations, it's easy to lose sight of issues that are equally important to America's future, but less prominent in the national debate.

One such issue is education reform. And the consensus is that current law, last reauthorized under No Child Left Behind in 2001, is onerous and unworkable.

For all its shortfalls, No Child Left Behind represented a bipartisan response to a declining education system. Granted, the student achievement gap is no smaller today than it was before the enactment of No Child Left Behind, but lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, from Sen. Ted Kennedy to now-Speaker of the House John Boehner, showed that education reform was far too important to ignore.

Ten years later, we have good insight into No Child Left Behind's weak points. Congress has heard from educators, school administrators and experts of all types, with the purpose of framing a reasonable way forward that relies on the input of those Americans who experience the day-to-day challenges of today's education system.

There is broad agreement that things need to change, but reforming current law only makes sense if the focus is on giving local stakeholders the flexibility they need to do their jobs. The needs of one state, or even one community to the next, often differ. What might be good for schools in East or North San Diego County, might not work for other schools throughout the rest of the county. So localizing the education process as much as possible is an essential step toward improving academic achievement. Yet, No Child Left Behind discourages anything that differentiates from a one-size-fits-all approach.

Recently, legislation was introduced in the House to provide the flexibility that states and school districts are demanding. That legislation, HR 2445, will soon move to the House floor for a vote, along with two other reform measures, both of which I've authored. The first, HR 1891, eliminates 42 programs identified as overlapping or inefficient by the nonpartisan Government

Accountability Office, the Obama administration and Congress. The second, HR 2218, streamlines the charter school program and provides opportunities to expand and replicate successful schools with added emphasis on accountability.

Additional reform measures will be introduced in the coming weeks, but what's been put forward so far sets a tone for reform based on extensive oversight and examination. It's progress in the right direction.

Leaders in the Senate have yet to make their position clear or offer a proposal of their own. For reform to occur, the Senate will need to do its part and join with the House in the same spirit that ushered No Child Left Behind through Congress and to the president's desk.

Through it all, we must not forget about our teachers, who provide the motivation, encouragement and direction students need. And while we cannot expect teachers to act as parents ---- taking on the role a mother, father or caretaker plays in helping a child grow ---- there will always be something unique about the relationship between a student and his or her teacher. These relationships often stay with people for many years after, if not a lifetime, showing the power of teacher's influence on a child.

America's schools, its teachers and students have always led the way. Doing what's necessary to return to the top is not just good for the quality of education nationwide, it's good for the economy and workforce.

When the conversation turns to education reform, it's really a discussion about America's future and where the next generation will take its place on the world stage. Now is the time to make the changes to put our children on a path to success.