EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY THROUGH SCHOOL CHOICE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC, FEBRUARY 3, 2016

Serial No. 114–37

Printed for the use of the Committee on Education and the Workforce

Available via the World Wide Web: *www.gpo.gov/fdsys/browse/committee.action?chamber=house&committee=education*
or
Committee address: *http://edworkforce.house.gov*

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

98–416 PDF WASHINGTON : 2016

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

JOHN KLINE, Minnesota, *Chairman*

Joe Wilson, South Carolina
Virginia Foxx, North Carolina
Duncan Hunter, California
David P. Roe, Tennessee
Glenn Thompson, Pennsylvania
Tim Walberg, Michigan
Matt Salmon, Arizona
Brett Guthrie, Kentucky
Todd Rokita, Indiana
Lou Barletta, Pennsylvania
Joseph J. Heck, Nevada
Luke Messer, Indiana
Bradley Byrne, Alabama
David Brat, Virginia
Buddy Carter, Georgia
Michael D. Bishop, Michigan
Glenn Grothman, Wisconsin
Steve Russell, Oklahoma
Carlos Curbelo, Florida
Elise Stefanik, New York
Rick Allen, Georgia

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Virginia
Ranking Member
Rubén Hinojosa, Texas
Susan A. Davis, California
Raúl M. Grijalva, Arizona
Joe Courtney, Connecticut
Marcia L. Fudge, Ohio
Jared Polis, Colorado
Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan,
Northern Mariana Islands
Frederica S. Wilson, Florida
Suzanne Bonamici, Oregon
Mark Pocan, Wisconsin
Mark Takano, California
Hakeem S. Jeffries, New York
Katherine M. Clark, Massachusetts
Alma S. Adams, North Carolina
Mark DeSaulnier, California

Juliane Sullivan, *Staff Director*
Denise Forte, *Minority Staff Director*

C O N T E N T S

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY OPPORTUNITY THROUGH SCHOOL CHOICE

Wednesday, February 3, 2016
House of Representatives,
Committee on Education and the Workforce,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in Room HVC–210, Capitol Visitor Center. Hon. John Kline [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Kline, Foxx, Roe, Guthrie, Rokita, Heck, Messer, Byrne, Brat, Carter, Bishop, Stefanik, Allen, Scott, Hinojosa, Fudge, Polis, Bonamici, Pocan, Takano, Jeffries, Clark, Adams, and DeSaulnier.

Staff Present: Lauren Aronson, Press Secretary; Janelle Belland, Coalitions and Members Services Coordinator; Amy Raaf Jones, Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Nancy Locke, Chief Clerk; Dominique McKay, Deputy Press Secretary; Krisann Pearce, General Counsel; Alexandra Pena, Intern; Mandy Schaumburg, Education Deputy Director and Senior Counsel; Juliane Sullivan, Staff Director; Brad Thomas, Senior Education Policy Advisor; Sheariah Yousefi, Legislative Assistant; Tylease Alli, Minority Clerk/Intern and Fellow Coordinator; Austin Barbera, Minority Staff Assistant; Jacque Chevalier, Minority Senior Education Policy Advisor; Denise Forte, Minority Staff Director; Christine Godinez, Minority Staff Assistant; Brian Kennedy, Minority General Counsel; Rayna Reid, Minority Education Policy Counsel; Saloni Sharma, Minority Press Assistant; Michael Taylor, Minority Education Policy Fellow; and Arika Trim, Minority Press Secretary.

Chairman KLINE. A quorum being present, the Committee on Education and the Workforce will come to order. Good morning, everyone, welcome to today's hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us as we discuss ways to expand educational opportunity through school choice.

This committee's work to improve K–12 education has always been guided by the belief that every child regardless of where they come from or how much money their parents make should receive an excellent education.

Unfortunately, some schools are failing to provide students that opportunity. Too many of our nation's students are entering high school without the critical skills they need to complete their edu-

cation, and too many graduates are going off to college or entering the workforce without the tools they need to succeed in life.

Everyone here agrees our children deserve better. They deserve the opportunity to receive a better education and pursue a better life. That is why improving K–12 education continues to be such an important priority at the federal, state, and local levels.

By empowering parents to do what is best for their child, school choice has been an instrumental part of that effort.

When we passed legislation last year to improve K–12 education, empowering parents was one of our primary goals because we know parents can make the most meaningful difference in their child's education.

Several reforms in the Every Student Succeeds Act help parents do what is best for their child's education by expanding school choice, reforms such as increasing access to quality charter schools and magnet schools, protecting home schools from federal interference, and launching a pilot program that will encourage excellent schools to enroll harder to serve students.

While these reforms are encouraging, education leaders in state capitals and local school districts are the real reason why the promise of school choice has touched the lives of so many parents and children. The progress we have seen over the last 25 years is remarkable.

The school choice movement began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1990, where local leaders piloted the first private school choice program, known as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The pilot provided low income families scholarships to attend a quality school.

Since then, the program has paved the way for thousands of students to receive a better education and inspired 27 other states to create different types of private school choice programs, many of which have been credited with helping students graduate not only from high school but from college as well.

My home state of Minnesota was not far behind Milwaukee in expanding educational opportunities for students and families. We never really consider ourselves behind Milwaukee, but in 1991, the state passed the nation's first charter school law, providing parents an alternative public school option that better met their child's needs.

Today, more than 40 states have passed charter school laws opening the doors to thousands of schools that have served millions of students.

These are just a few examples of how school choice is helping students and families. Last week marked the 5th Annual National School Choice Week, where more than 16,000 events in all 50 states showcased the success of school choice from private school scholarships and public charter schools, to home schooling and education savings accounts.

In all its forms, school choice has provided real hope to mom's, dad's, and children across the country.

Today, as we learn more about how states and local communities are expanding school choice, I encourage my colleagues to ask how we can support these efforts and help more children receive the education they deserve.

With that, I will yield to the Ranking Member, Mr. Scott, for his opening remarks.

[The information follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. John Kline, Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us as we discuss ways to expand educational opportunity through school choice.

This committee's work to improve K–12 education has always been guided by the belief that every child – regardless of where they come from or how much money their parents make – should receive an excellent education. Unfortunately, some schools are failing to provide students that opportunity. Too many of our nation's students are entering high school without the critical skills they need to complete their education, and too many graduates are going off to college or entering the workforce without the tools they need to succeed in life.

Everyone here agrees our children deserve better. They deserve the opportunity to receive a better education and pursue a better life. That's why improving K–12 education continues to be such an important priority at the federal, state, and local levels. By empowering parents to do what's best for their child, school choice has been an instrumental part of that effort.

When we passed legislation last year to improve K–12 education, empowering parents was one of our primary goals, because we know parents can make the most meaningful difference in their child's education. Several reforms in the Every Student Succeeds Act help parents do what's best for their child's education by expanding school choice, reforms such as: increasing access to quality charter schools and magnet schools; protecting home schools from federal interference; and launching a pilot program that will encourage excellent schools to enroll harder to serve students.

While these reforms are encouraging, education leaders in state capitals and local school districts are the real reason why the promise of school choice has touched the lives of so many parents and children. The progress we have seen over the last 25 years is remarkable.

The school choice movement began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1990, where local leaders piloted the first private school choice program. Known as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the pilot provided low-income families scholarships to attend a quality school. Since then, the program has paved the way for thousands of students to receive a better education and inspired 27 other states to create different types of private school choice programs – many of which have been credited with helping students graduate not only from high school, but from college as well.

My home state of Minnesota was not far behind Milwaukee in expanding educational opportunities for students and families. In 1991, the state passed the nation's first charter school law, providing parents an alternative public school option that better met their child's needs. Today more than 40 states have passed charter school laws, opening the doors to thousands of schools that have served millions of students.

These are just a few examples of how school choice is helping students and families. Last week marked the 5th annual National School Choice Week, where more than 16,000 events in all 50 states showcased the success of school choice, from private school scholarships and public charter schools to homeschooling and education savings accounts. In all its forms, school choice has provided real hope to moms, dads, and children across the country.

Today, as we learn more about how states and local communities are expanding school choice, I encourage my colleagues to ask how we can support these efforts and help more children receive the education they deserve.

With that, I will yield to Ranking Member Scott for his opening remarks.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today, we will discuss the private school choice initiatives that have proliferated throughout the country for the last 20 years.

As you know, educational funds provided by the Federal Government do not exist in a vacuum. Drastic cuts in general education budgets in a number of states threaten the ability to fully imple-

ment initiatives to improve the quality of education for students nationwide.

Today, we have before us yet another challenge to the limited pool of funding, one that serves to divert public funds to subsidize the private education of a relatively small number of children at the expense of a larger majority attending public schools.

More broadly, the legacy of ESEA that improvements in education support a basic civil right and should benefit all of our children—that concept is at risk.

Private school choice programs, be they vouchers or tax credits and educational savings accounts, purport to be part of that same legacy. They also claim to provide the neediest children with the ability to make a choice to attend higher performing schools beyond their means.

State-collected data show that more than two-thirds of the students in the Wisconsin Choice Program and about half of the Indiana voucher recipients were enrolled in private schools before they received the voucher. Instead of providing a choice to students in underperforming schools, these programs are using public money to pay tuition for students already in private schools.

Mr. Chairman, in the early 1990s, this committee had a subcommittee hearing in Wisconsin, and information we gleaned from that hearing showed that the cost of covering those who were already in private schools, the cost of providing them with a voucher, would have diverted the equivalent of about $25,000 per classroom into private vouchers, denying the people in public schools that benefit.

In addition to these programs not serving a population they were legislatively created to support, once advertised as protecting a civil right for low-income families and their children, private school choice programs in Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Florida are raising eligibility requirements to emaking tuition assistance available to those from much higher income brackets.

The impact of these changes is not readily apparent considering that not all programs require schools to accept vouchers as full tuition compensation. The family well below the poverty level faces limitations in the choice of schools available to them – limitations that families with more resources do not suffer.

An example of this can be found right here in our nation's capital where over half of the participants in the D.C. Opportunity Program are enrolled in just 8 out of 50 schools. Tuition at these schools is entirely covered by the voucher, but less than a quarter of all available schools have viable options, and the idea that parents have a real choice must be called into question.

Once families overcome barriers to admissions due to financial concerns, private school choice sleave them and their students without the protections required of public school systems enforced by federal statutes.

Studies have indicated that students in voucher programs are less likely to have equitable access to key services such as ESOL and special education, services that private schools in many states are not obligated to provide.

Regarding attrition in programs like Wisconsin's Parental School Choice Program, one study found that those who leave by choice or

otherwise tend to be the more disadvantaged than those who remain.

Families are enrolling in private schools with the expectation that they will provide greater academic outcomes for their families and their children but sadly, this is frequently not the case. Evidence of private schools participating in choice programs increasing academic achievement compared to public schools is limited. number of studies in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C. found no positive effects on student achievement as a result of participation. In fact, participation in scholarship programs in Louisiana was found to have a substantial negative effect on academic achievement in math, reading, science, and social studies.

Today, we are left discussing the false choice for families in need, one that puts at risk the idea of our shared future successes, which is most certain when we invest in equitable education and educational opportunities for all students, and this may threaten the basic civil rights protections of the students that we are trying to protect.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses, and yield back the balance of my time.

[The information follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Ranking Member, Committee on Education and the Workforce

Good morning, Chairman Kline. Today we will discuss private school choice initiatives, which have proliferated throughout the country over the last 20 years.

As you know, educational funds provided by the federal government do not exist in a vacuum. Drastic cuts to general education budgets in a number of states threaten the ability to fully implement initiatives to improve the quality of education for students nationwide.

Today, we have before us yet another challenge to the limited pool of funding, one that serves to divert public funds to subsidize the private education of a relatively small number of children at the expense of the larger majority attending public schools.

More broadly, the legacy of ESEA – that improvements to education support a basic civil right, and should benefit ALL of our children – is at risk. Private school choice programs, be they vouchers or similar programs like tax credits and education savings accounts, purport to be part of that same legacy. They also claim to provide the neediest students with the ability to make a "choice" to attend higher-performing schools beyond their means.

State-collected data showed that more than two-thirds of students in the Wisconsin choice program and half of the Indiana voucher recipients were enrolled in private schools before receiving a voucher. Instead of providing a choice to students in under-performing public schools, these programs are using public money to pay the tuition of students already in private schools.

In addition, these programs are not serving the population they were allegedly created to support. Once advertised as protecting a "civil right" for low-income families and their children, private school choice

programs in Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Florida are raising eligibility requirements, making tuition assistance available to those from higher income brackets.

If the impact of these changes is not readily apparent, consider that not all programs require schools to accept vouchers as full tuition compensation. A family well below the federal poverty level faces limitations on the choice of schools available to them that families with more resources can bypass. An example of this can be found right here in our nation's capital, where over half of the participants in the D.C. Opportunity program are enrolled in just eight schools, out of over 50 total. Tuition at these eight schools is entirely covered by the award – when less than a quarter of all available schools are viable options, the idea that parents have any real choice must be called into question.

Once families overcome barriers to admission due to financial concerns, private school choice programs leave them and their students without protections required of public school systems and enforced by federal

statute. Studies have indicated that students in voucher programs were less likely to have equitable access to key services such as ESOL and special education, services that private schools in many states are not obligated to provide. Attrition in programs like Wisconsin's Parental School Choice Program, is high, with one study finding those who leave – by choice or otherwise – tend to be more disadvantaged than those who remain.

Families are enrolling private schools with the expectation that they will provide greater academic outcomes for their children, but sadly, that is frequently not the case. Evidence that private schools participating in choice programs increase academic achievement compared to public schools is limited, and a number of studies in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C. have found no positive effects on student achievement as a result of participation. In fact, participation in the scholarship program in Louisiana was found to have substantial negative effects on academic achievement for math, reading, science, and social studies.

Today we are left with discussing a false choice for families in need, one that puts at risk the idea that our shared future success is most certain when we invest in equitable educational opportunities for all students, and threatens to violate basic civil rights protections.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. Pursuant to

Committee Rule 7(c), all members will be permitted to submit written statements to be included in the permanent hearing record, and without objection, the hearing record will remain open for 14 days to allow such statements and other extraneous material referenced during the hearing to be submitted for the official hearing record.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our distinguished witnesses. Mr. Gerard Robinson is a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute here in Washington, D.C. Mr. Robinson works on issues relating to school choice, educational policy, K–12 education, for-profit schools, community colleges, and historically black colleges and universities.

Before joining AEI, Mr. Robinson served as the Commissioner of Education for the State of Florida, and Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I will now turn to Dr. Foxx to introduce our next witness.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Chairman Kline. Today, I have the honor of introducing a witness hailing from my home State of North Carolina, Representative Rob Bryan. He is well qualified to serve as a witness on education and school choice as he spent his first two years after college in the Teach for America Program at a classroom in inner-city Los Angeles. Today, he is also a member of BEST North Carolina, where he works with the North Carolina Teacher of the Year, James Ford, to identify the best evidence based strategies to pay, evaluate, and retain teachers.

Representative Bryan is a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives, where he is the chairman of the Education Appropriations Subcommittee, and a member of the Education Committee. He also co-chaired the North Carolina General Assembly's Educator Compensation and Effectiveness Taskforce.

In addition to his work in education, Representative Bryan serves as a lawyer at the Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice law firm. He graduated from fine North Carolina universities, UNC–Chapel Hill and the Duke University's Law School. He and his wife, Dottie have six children and attend Uptown Church. It may be his parenting six children that give him the best expertise.

Chairman KLINE. Thank you, Dr. Foxx. Let me resume with the introduction for today's witnesses. Dr. Luis Huerta is an Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York City.

I always get a kick out of this. My script actually says New York City, New York. We want to be thorough on these things.

He served as a research associate and coordinator for K–12 education policy research at Policy Analysis for California Education Center, and taught in the California Public School System for six years.

Currently, Dr. Huerta's research focuses on education policy, decentralized, related to school choice reforms, privatization in education, and school finance inequities present throughout school reform.

Ms. Denisha Merriweather is a graduate student at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. Ms. Merriweather is the recipient of a tax credit scholarship in Florida. She attributes her academic and career success to the opportunities provided through the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which awarded her the opportunity to attend and graduate from the Esprit de Corps Center for Learning in Jacksonville, Florida.

Let me now ask our witnesses to stand and raise your right hand. Thank you.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Chairman KLINE. Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Before I recognize each of you to provide your testimony, let me briefly explain or remind you of our lighting system. We allow 5 minutes for each witness to provide testimony. When you begin, the light in front of you will turn green. When 1 minute is left, the light will turn yellow. At the 5 minute mark, the light will turn red, and I would ask you to please try to wrap up your testimony.

I do not know that I have ever actually gaveled down a witness because they did not close in 5 minutes, but if you would please try to wrap up in respect for the other witnesses, and then when we come to questions and answers, we will hold to the 5 minute rule that I have been known to gavel down, including on me.

Okay, I think we are ready to go. Let me recognize Mr. Robinson for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF GERARD ROBINSON, RESIDENT FELLOW, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. ROBINSON. Good morning, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, members of the committee. My name is Gerard Robinson. I am a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. What I share with you today are my own opinions and do not necessarily reflect those of the AEI.

I have had an opportunity to work in education since 1991, and I have seen the impact of school choice policies and programs on families and children through the lens of an advocate, president of a non-profit organization, state leader in Virginia and Florida, and as a researcher.

I can tell you quite clearly that school choice is not a sound bite, it is a social movement. From 1990 to 2015, over 40 states have

introduced different types of school choice legislation, both public and private. Today, I will talk briefly about four, charter schools, vouchers, tax credits, and education savings accounts.

I have had an opportunity to see all these programs in action, and one thing I would like to say up front is there is a misconception that school choice only helps wealthy families. The reality is families with means already exercise school choice. They do so by moving into neighborhoods where they have great schools, both public and private. School choice is simply expanding the doors of opportunity to families who may not have that opportunity.

One example is in the charter school movement what started off initially as an experiment to provide teachers a stronger voice and innovative ideas in public schools has now mushroomed into a movement where we have 2.9 million students in 43 states in 6,723 charter schools, who are doing well.

Taxpayers and families simply want to know one thing, do they work. According to a CREDO study in 2015 that looked at 42 areas in 22 states, they identified there were at least 40 days' worth of learning gain for students in math, and 28 days in reading. There was particular growth for African American students, 36 learning days for math and 26 for reading. Similar growth for Hispanic students. We also found growth as well for Asian students, particularly in math.

Frankly, there were also some challenges, our Native American students and some of our white students scored less well than their peers.

We move now to vouchers, it was mentioned earlier, vouchers in Milwaukee. I had a chance to work there firsthand. Same question, is it making a difference? Well, according to at least 13 gold standard studies, six have found that the students in a voucher program had gains, four in particular found there were gains for African American students, two found no major differences, and at least one found there were negative differences, particularly in the sciences and math, and in particular, that was Louisiana.

Vouchers made a tremendous impact on the lives of students in Milwaukee and other areas, and we can talk further about that point.

Tax credits, I would say one of the faster growing movements in the private school sector. You now have a number of students, over approximately 200,000, who are involved in tax credits. The same question, do they work?

If you take a look at Florida, which has the largest tax credit program in the country, over 72,000 students there, Dr. Figlio, a professor at Northwestern University, studied a program for a number of years, and he found two things. In a 2014 study, he identified there was at least a year's growth for students who were in that program.

Why is that important? The majority of the students who participated in that program, (a) came from lower performing public schools and tend to be among the lower performing students who left public schools, and secondly, they have an opportunity now to see gains in that area.

Next is education savings accounts. We now have those in Florida, Mississippi, Nevada, Tennessee, and it started off in Arizona.

Smaller movement, but we expect to see some growth in that area. There are currently 6,772 students who are involved in that program in Florida, Arizona, and Mississippi.

If there is something that Congress can do to support school choice, here are a few examples. Number one is to encourage states to take full advantage of language that you have in ESSA to allow them to be innovative with public funds.

Number two is to make Title I funds portable. I know that caused a great deal of consternation for the Congress, maybe one place where we can find middle ground is to allow states to make that decision.

Third is to make IDEA funds available through a statewide voucher. Fourth is to continue to support statewide vouchers. Fifth, either direct the Congressional Budget Office or the General Accounting Office to figure out what federal regulations are in place, to how we can streamline those to help funds support ESSAs, and lastly, redesign 529s so families can have that information earlier.

Thank you for your time.

[The statement of Mr. Robinson follows:]

Statement before the United States Congress House Committee on
Education and the Workforce
"Expanding Educational Opportunity Through School Choice"

School Choice in America: What Does Research Tell Us?

Gerard Robinson
Resident Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

February 3, 2016

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.

Good morning, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the Committee. It is an honor to be here to share with you what the research says about school choice.

My name is Gerard Robinson and I am a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based here in Washington, D.C. My comments today are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of AEI. I have worked in education since 1991, and have seen the effects of school choice policies and programs on families and children through the lens of an advocate, president of a nonprofit organization, state education executive in Virginia and Florida, and a researcher.

School choice is more than a sound bite—it is a social movement. Between 1990 and 2015, lawmakers in over 40 states and the District of Columbia have enacted a range of school choice laws. The rationale for doing so spans from empowering teachers to create innovative classrooms to expanding opportunities for parents. Polling data from a Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll and *Education Next* indicate that the American public supports school choice.[1] So do leaders in corporate, philanthropic and faith-based communities. Why? Because school choice programs advance opportunity.

In this testimony I will focus on four school choice programs: charter schools, vouchers, tax credits, and education savings accounts (ESAs). It is worth noting early in my testimony the popular misconception about school choice—that it only benefits children from wealthy households or is used solely by white and Asian families. In reality, affluent families are more able to move to the district of their choice, giving them a method by which to choose their school in the absence of school choice policies. One of the great accomplishments of the school choice movement, then, is that it has been able to serve students from all races and backgrounds that might not otherwise have the ability to choose their school. While research has shown that many subgroups of students benefit from school choice policies, students in urban settings have been found to benefit the most.

Charter Schools

The fastest growing public sector choice program in the U.S. is charter schools. What began in Minnesota in 1991 as an experiment to empower teachers has grown to 2.9 million students in 43 states attending 6,723 charter schools in 2015. Approximately 55% of charter schools have been operating for 7 years or more, and over half of all charter schools are located in cities. In fact, a report published by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in 2015 identified 10 districts with the largest percentage of charter school students, and 10 districts with the fastest enrollment growth—most of these districts are located in states represented on this committee.[2] With 1 million students on charter school waiting lists today, states must create innovative ways to meet demand. In the interim, taxpayers have one question about charter schools: do they improve student outcomes? The answer is yes.

According to a 2015 report published by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, charter school students outperform their traditional public school peers in math and reading.[3] This national study is important because it provides a careful and comprehensive analysis of the effects charter schools have on urban school students. For instance, the report examined achievement results for students enrolled in charters and traditional public schools between 2006-2007 and 2011-2012 that were located in 41 urban areas in 22 states. CREDO researchers concluded that charter school students gained 40 additional "days of learning" when compared to their public school peers. Black students gained the most from their enrollment in charter schools compared to their peers in charters as well as their peers in public schools: on average, they received an additional 36 days of learning in math and 26 days in reading compared to their non-charter peers. Hispanic students gained days of learning in math and reading as well, while Asian students gained days of learning in math only. While charter schools have produced great results, there is still room for improvement. For example, the CREDO report identified that Native American students in traditional public schools significantly outperformed their charter school peers in math, and white students in traditional public schools significantly outperformed their charter peers in reading and math.

Choice programs in the private school sector are growing as well. In 2015, the U.S. had 48 publically funded private school choice programs educating more than 400,000 students in 23 states and the District of Columbia. The nation's first city-based publicly funded private choice plan is the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).

Scholarships (i.e., Vouchers)

Founded in 1990, MPCP provides a scholarship (i.e., voucher) to low-income parents to pay for an education at a private school of their choice. Today, MPCP awards scholarships to 27,619 students.[4] In 2014-2015, the U.S. had approximately 140,000 students using a publically funded voucher to attend school. Some of these scholarship programs operate exclusively in cities, including Cleveland and the District of Columbia. Other programs are statewide, operating in Indiana and Louisiana. Again, the public and policymakers often ask: do these programs work? Research says they do, with a few caveats.

The majority of the 13 "gold standard" experimental evaluations of the impact of private school choice programs on student test scores found statistically significant benefits on academic outcomes for participating students. In particular, 6 show positive outcomes for all participating groups, 4 show positive effects on black students, 2 show no effects, and 1 shows negative effects. In 2012, Dr. Patrick Wolf, University of Arkansas professor and the key principal investigator of MPCP and the District of Columbia Scholarship Program (OPS), did a summary of longitudinal evaluations of MPCP. His review found that voucher students had higher high school graduation and college enrollment rates as compared to their peers in traditional public schools.[5]

Similar findings exist for OSP. Results from an evaluation of achievement data of students who received a scholarship offer and those who did not receive an offer four years later are as follow: (1) reading and math scores for students who were offered (or used) a scholarship were similar to students who did not receive a scholarship; (2) 82% of students who were offered a scholarship graduated from high school compared to 70% of students who were not offered a scholarship; and (3) parents' overall satisfaction with the school was positive.[6]

It is worth noting that the majority of the students enrolled in the Milwaukee and the District of Columbia scholarship programs are from low-income and working-class households, and are members of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. As I mentioned earlier, there is a popular misconception that scholarships (or charter schools) benefit children from wealthy families at the expense of others. The research proves the opposite is the case.

Yet, while several voucher programs across the country have shown promising results for students, there are also some exceptions. In a 2015 National Bureau of Economic Research report, the Louisiana Scholarship Program was found to have negative effects on students' learning outcomes in science, reading, and social studies.[7] Further research is needed to uncover why these findings deviate from other findings on voucher programs, but the Louisiana story reminds us that several other factors—including how choice programs are designed and implemented—matter a great deal for a program's ability to create positive outcomes for students.

Tax Credits

The fastest growing private school choice program is tax credits. Begun in Arizona in 1997, tax credit programs were educating approximately 200,000 students in 2015. Do they work? Florida has the largest tax credit program in the nation with 78,142 students. Pursuant to Florida law, the state department of education must hire an expert to annually evaluate the tax credit program. Dr. David Figlio, Professor of Education and Social Policy and Economics at Northwestern University, has been a director of the evaluation project for several years. According to an evaluation of the program published by Dr. Figlio in 2014, participating students "come from less advantaged families than other students receiving free or reduced-price lunches"; tend to be among the lower performing students in an already low-performing public school; and many are Black and Hispanic. After reviewing their results on nationally normed tests (i.e., Stanford Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and TerraNova), Dr. Figlio concluded that tax credit students gained one year's worth of learning in one year's time.[8] This is an important achievement. Why?

According to a 2010 study by Drs. Figlio, Cassandra M.D. Hart and Molly Metzger, Florida's tax credit scholarship students on average come from low-performing public schools, and often have lower test scores than their peers who did not apply for a scholarship.[9] For this reason, one year's worth of growth is a meaningful step in the right direction. A 2013 study by James Kelly and Dr. Ben Scafidi identified reasons other than

test scores for why parents in Georgia chose to participate in a tax credit program. Reasons included more individualized attention, values of the school, class size, and student safety.[10]

Education Savings Accounts

Education Savings Accounts (ESA) are the latest addition to the private school choice movement. Since the first ESA law was enacted in Arizona in 2011, four other states have enacted ESA policies: Florida, Mississippi, Nevada and Tennessee. [11] Approximately 6,772 students have an ESA in Arizona, Florida, and Mississippi combined, and other states are currently considering ESA legislation.

The Role of Congress

I believe state legislatures will enact more school choice laws in 2016. Is there a role for this committee to play in supporting school choice at the state level? Yes. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Encourage states to take full advantage of the option provided in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to voluntarily use public funds to experiment with innovative education models.

2. Allow states to make Title I portable. Congress removed this option from an earlier version of ESSA. One way to find middle ground on this issue is to put the decision in the hands of states.

3. Allow states to make IDEA funds portable as part of a statewide voucher.

4. Continue to fund charter schools, which the committee supported in ESSA.

5. Direct the General Accounting Office, Congressional Budget Office, or another entity to evaluate how federal rules for state funding may prohibit states such as Nevada from folding Title I or IDEA funds into existing ESA policies.

6. Redesign 529 accounts to give parents access to these funds earlier in their child's education.

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony before this committee. I believe school choice is one of the most important social movements of the last 25 years. School choice is changing the academic and economic trajectory for millions of children and families. I am pleased with the committee's focus on this topic. I look forward to your questions.

[1] Henderson, Michael B., Paul E. Peterson, and Martin R. West. "The 2015 EdNext Poll on School Reform." *Education Next* 16, no. 1 (2016). http://educationnext.org/files/ednext_XVI_1_2015poll.pdf; "The 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." *PDK/Gallup* (2015). http://pdkpoll2015.pdkintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/pdkpoll47_2015.pdf; and The Center for Education Reform. *2015 Progress Report: Where We've Been.* Washington, DC. 2015. http://issuu.com/centerforedreform/docs/cer-2015-progressreport?e=3864535/31897424.

[2] National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. *A Growing Movement: America's Largest Charter School Communities.* Washington, DC. (2015). http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/enrollmentshare_web.pdf.

[3] Center for Research on Education Outcomes. *Urban Charter School Study Report on 41 Regions.* Stanford, CA. (2015). http://urbancharters.stanford.edu/overview.php.

[4] Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. "MPCP Facts and Figures for 2015-2016." http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sms/pdf/MPCP%20Sept%20Facts%20and%20Figures%202015-16.pdf.

[5] For Dr. Wolf's research about MPCP, see University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform. "Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) Evaluation." http://www.uaedreform.org/milwaukee-parental-choice-program-evaluation/; and Wolf, Patrick J., "The Comprehensive Longitudinal Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: Summary of Final Report, SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation, Report #36," *The University of Arkansas Department of* Education, (February 2012). For background information on early gold standard studies about private school choice, see Forster, Greg. "A win-win solution: The empirical evidence on school choice." *Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice* (2013). http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2013-4-A-Win-Win-Solution-WEB.pdf.

[6]Wolf, Patrick J., Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Brian Kisida, Lou Rizzo, Nada Eissa, and Matthew Carr. "Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report. NCEE 2010-4018." *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance* (2010). For other studies about OPS, see Wolf, Patrick J., Brian Kisida, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Nada Eissa, and Lou Rizzo, "School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, D.C.," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 32, no. 2 (2013): 246–270; and Wolf, Patrick J. and Michael McShane, "Is the Juice Worth the Squeeze? A Benefit/Cost Analysis of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarships Program," *Association for Education Finance and Policy* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 74-99.

[7] Abdulkadiroglu, Atila, Parag A. Pathak, and Christopher R. Walters. *School Vouchers and Student Achievement: First-Year Evidence from the Louisiana Scholarship Program.*

Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research (2015). http://www.nber.org/papers/w21839.

[8] Figlio, David N. *Evaluation of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program Participation, Compliance and Test Scores in 2012-13*. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research (2014). https://www.stepupforstudents.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ftc_research_2012-13_report.pdf.

[9] Figlio, David, Cassandra M.D. Hart, and Molly Metzger. "Who uses a means-tested scholarship, and what do they choose?" *Economics of Education Review* 29, no. 2 (2010): 301-317.

[10] Kelly, James P., and Ben Scafidi. *More Than Scores: An Analysis of Why and How Parents Choose Private Schools*. Indianapolis: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice (2013). https://www.heartland.org/sites/default/files/more-than-scores.pdf.

[11] American Federation for Children. "Types of Educational Choice." http://www.federationforchildren.org/ed-choice-101/types-educational-choice/.

Chairman KLINE. Thank you for your testimony. Mr. Bryan?

TESTIMONY OF ROB BRYAN, NORTH CAROLINA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. BRYAN. It is an honor for me to be here this morning. As you guys are well aware, legislators, like the laborers in the Bible parables, arrive at different times and play different roles in harvesting and planting crops. By that I mean sponsoring and getting good legislation passed.

Working for school choice and opportunity scholarships in particular has been a long labor. In North Carolina, there was much sowing of seeds to expand opportunities for parents and students across our state.

As a freshman legislator in 2013, I had the privilege of arriving at the right time to be a part of those first fruits for school choice in North Carolina.

By way of my background, and going back about 20 years, I was an early Teach for America teacher in a bilingual classroom in inner-city Los Angeles. Between my two years of teaching, I was the first intern at the Center for Education Reform right here in D.C.

These experiences have shaped my perspective as a legislator and made me a fan of expanding school choice options, especially for low income families who typically have the fewest options.

All this led me to be the primary sponsor of the opportunity scholarship law, which provides roughly 6,000 low income students and their families a scholarship to go to the school of their choice. Moreover, I am proud that this historic legislation had bipartisan leadership, with two Republicans and two Democrats serving as the primary sponsors standing together to make this opportunity a reality for thousands of students.

We also had our state's first school choice program, the special needs education grant, passed in 2011, which was also passed with broad bipartisan support.

Unfortunately, many establishment folks in education and often the press are not fans of opportunity scholarships. They outline fears and pessimism, concerns over bad schools and lack of regulation, while neglecting our hopes, the opportunities, and the evidence.

As a lawyer, I appreciate looking at the evidence. There are significant pieces of evidence that are available in discussing opportunity scholarships. I think in reverse order of importance, they are that opportunity scholarships actually save money, both at the state and local level. They improve public schools, and most importantly, they improve outcomes for students.

I think this has been good policy for North Carolina and for the rest of the country. Where does this policy intersect with reality for the families in each of your districts and mine? It is easy for us to fail to recognize the real lives impacted. The needs of these families are compelling. The opportunity scholarship program and our existing special needs program have provided new opportunities and challenges.

Our special needs scholarship to date, all the funds have been used, and there are over 500 families on a waiting list. Our oppor-

tunity scholarship program has over 13,000 applicants, and this figure will go up as the application period has just opened again.

I know numbers are thrown at all of us constantly, but please try to individualize these numbers. Think about each one of the families that is hoping, waiting for a scholarship. I have had to look these parents in the eyes, and it can wait no longer. We need to provide choices for them.

Distinguished members of this committee, we expect options and choices in today's world. Many families who can afford to are already exercising those options.

I am happy to say that North Carolina through the passage and implementation of these scholarship programs is now creating pathways for lower income and working families to participate in parental school choice, and they are doing so by the thousands.

Unfortunately, thousands more need your help. Although I am here representing the great State of North Carolina, I know there are other states like ours who appreciate the fact that you, our members of the United States House of Representatives, are exploring ideas of how more can be done to help families like the ones I have described.

I am also glad to be here to highlight the impact, the positive impact opportunity scholarships are having in North Carolina. As I look out my window on the 35th floor, I look down and see First Baptist Church. First Baptist Church is now housing the Brookstone Schools, which is an academically excellent urban Christian school serving low-income families. This school has a rich history of engaging, educating, and empowering students that come out of poverty and often the most dysfunction families and communities.

Brookstone Schools participate in the opportunity scholarship program where they have enrolled 23 students this year. I am fortunate to see much of the City of Charlotte out my window, but this view of the Brookstone Schools has become my favorite.

Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the committee, I want to thank you again for your initiative in holding this hearing, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to share with you this morning.

[The statement of Mr. Bryan follows:]

Statement before the United States Congress House Committee on Education and the Workforce

"Expanding Educational Opportunity Through School Choice"

Presented by: N.C. House Representative Rob Bryan

Good morning, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the Committee. It is an honor for me to be here this morning. Legislators, like the laborers in the Bible parables, arrive at different times and play different roles in planting and harvesting the crops (i.e. sponsoring and passing good legislation). Working for school choice, and Opportunity Scholarships in particular, has been a long labor. In North Carolina, there was much prior sowing of seeds to expand opportunities for parents and students across our state. As a freshman legislator in 2013, I had the privilege of arriving at the right time to be a part of the first fruits for school choice in NC.

Now, by way of background (and going back about 20 years), I was an early Teach for America teacher in a bilingual classroom in inner-city Los Angeles and, between my two years teaching, I was the first intern at the Center for Education Reform here in DC. These experiences shaped my perspective as a legislator and made me a fan of expanding school choice opportunities, especially for low-income families with the fewest options.

All this led me to be the primary sponsor of North Carolina's opportunity scholarship law which now provides roughly 6,000 low-income students (and families) a scholarship to go to the school of their choice. Moreover, I am proud that this historic legislation had bipartisan leadership with two Republican and two Democratic House Members standing together to make this opportunity a reality for thousands of children and families. Additionally, I'm proud to note that our state's first school choice program, the Special Needs Education Scholarship Grant passed in 2011, which was designed for families whose children are in need of specialized education, passed both NC chambers easily, garnering almost unanimous support from Republicans and nearly 70% of Democrats.

Unfortunately, many education establishment folks (and often the press) aren't fans of opportunity scholarships – they outline all our fears and pessimism (what about some bad schools, the lack of regulation, etc.), while neglecting our hopes, our opportunities – and the EVIDENCE.

As a lawyer, I appreciate looking at the evidence. There are significant pieces of evidence that are of importance in discussing opportunity scholarships. In reverse order of importance -

1) OS save money. Both at the state and local level.
2) OS improve public schools.
3) OS improve outcomes for students.

I think this is good policy for North Carolina and the rest of the country. Where does this policy intersect with reality – the reality for families in each of your districts? It is easy for us as legislators to fail to recognize the real lives impacted by our decisions.

The needs of these families are compelling – the Opportunity Scholarship program combined with North Carolina's existing Special Needs Education Scholarship has provided new opportunities and challenges:

1) To date, due to the high-demand of families for Special Needs Scholarships, there are no remaining funds available and we have over 500 families in North Carolina on the waiting list for this program.
2) To date, The Opportunity Scholarship Program has over 13,000 student applications and this staggering number will increase dramatically as new registration season has recently opened.

Numbers are thrown at us all constantly – but please try individualizing each of these numbers. Think about each one of these families that are on the waiting list hoping and praying for a scholarship. It's interesting that we call it the waiting list - I've looked parents in the eye while they share their very personal story of why their child desperately needs this scholarship. They can wait no longer!

Distinguished members of this committee, we expect options and choices in today's world – many families are making choices - North Carolina has over 1.3 million students in public district schools but our state has over 107,000 kids that are homeschooled; nearly 100,000 kids taught in private school; and nearly 80,000 kids taught in public charter schools. We are a state that is embracing parental school choice. However, historically, the families who were exercising this precious option were families who could afford to do so.

I am happy to say that North Carolina, through the passage and implementation of these scholarship programs, is now creating pathways for lower-income and working-class families to participate in parental school choice – and they are doing so by the thousands.

Unfortunately, thousands upon thousands more need your help. And though I'm here representing the great state of North Carolina, I know that there are other states like ours who appreciate the fact that you, our members of the United States House of Representatives, are exploring ideas of how more can be done to assist families like the ones I've described.

I am glad to be with you today to highlight the positive impact that OS is having on the families in North Carolina. As I look out the window in my legal office on the 35th floor, I see First Baptist Church which houses the Brookstone Schools which is an academically excellent, urban Christian school serving low-income families. This school has a rich history of engaging, educating and empowering students coming out of poverty and often from the most dysfunctional of homes and communities. Today, Brookstone Schools participates in the Opportunity Scholarship Program where they've enrolled 23 students this year. I am fortunate to see much of the City of Charlotte from the 35th floor, but I must tell you, this view – the view of Brookstone Schools – has become my favorite in Uptown Charlotte.

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the Committee, I want to thank you once again for your initiative in holding this hearing and I'm honored to have had the opportunity to share with you this morning.

Chairman KLINE. Thank you, sir. Dr. Huerta?

TESTIMONY OF LUIS A. HUERTA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AND PUBLIC POLICY, TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Mr. HUERTA. Good morning, Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the House Education and Workforce Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

My presentation this morning will focus on many of the claims promoted by many voucher advocates followed by a discussion of assumptions linked to these claims, and more importantly, the evidence that provides facts that dispel the many claims, some of which we have already heard.

I will focus on issues of achievement, as well as less discussed issues linked to the supply side response and potential pitfalls that have not been considered by policy makers as voucher and tuition tax credit programs go to scale.

The first claim that we often hear is that private schools are more cost effective and efficient in educating all students compared to public schools. This claim equates private school tuition often with the cost of actually educating students, and assumes that private schools can actually educate all students, including special ed, limited English proficient, and other students with higher needs, more cost effectively than public schools.

The claim fails to acknowledge that the cost differentials including services provided and types of students that are served are important in fully accounting for the real cost of voucher and tuition tax credit programs.

Measuring the cost effectiveness of private schools must also weigh the quality amount of services provided to all students, including the number and types of students, church subsidies and endowments that are provided that are not accounted for in public accounting, low cost facilities and low wage teachers. We know teachers in private schools usually earn about 20 to 25 percent less than public schools. The administrative and financial burdens of operating these choice programs which fall on the state.

In addition, measuring efficiency must also weigh the challenges of taking voucher and tuition tax credit programs to scale. Increased demand for private schooling will require participating private schools to actually address the needs of all students with diversities, and provide services equivalent to the public school systems, which could essentially address some of these cost differentials.

The next claim that we often hear is voucher and tuition tax credit programs will enhance school choice by making private school tuition more affordable and increasing access for all students.

This claim assumes that voucher and tuition tax credit programs offer an adequate economic incentive to offset the cost of private school tuition for all families. This claim fails to acknowledge that the expansion of private school choice is more dependent on a criteria schools use in choosing students and less dependent on giving parents the ability to choose schools.

Private school tuition rates are not regulated by states, nor do states actually collect accurate information on private school tuition rates. Without an accurate account of actual tuition costs, parents are not informed of additional costs they must bear. The scholarship amounts may result in only partial payment in some cases, which will threaten the guarantee that is linked to most state constitutions, to provide a free and public education.

Another issue that is seldom not talked about is tuition elasticity, which is dependent on which private schools participate, the subsidy amounts, and the types of students that private schools actually serve.

Because states do not regulate tuition prices, families that use the benefit to enter private schools today may not have sufficient residual income to pay for tuition later.

Another issue is supply side response, which is seldom accounted for, and that is specifically the extent of open seats that are available and how open seats should become made available as we go to scale.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been very active in lobbying for tuition subsidies, and it is also realistic in acknowledging that a much larger benefit is needed to entice families to exit public schools. There have been estimates by the Minnesota Catholic Conference that for them to actually increase the supply of empty seats, they would have to have a subsidy in the amount of $14,000 to $16,000 to actually increase capital improvements.

I am going to switch to academic achievement issues, which has already been mentioned. The claim is that private schools are more effective than public schools in addressing students' academic needs and improving students' educational outcomes.

This claim assumes that private schools are more effective in serving the educational needs of all students, including special ed, English language learners, and other students.

Evidence of voucher program effectiveness remains uncertain, and with inconsistent effects on student academic growth, and thus, these results should be interpreted with high caution.

For example, an analysis of voucher studies completed prior to 2009 by C.E. Rouse, professor at Princeton, concluded that research on vouchers finds relatively small achievement gains for voucher students, most of which are not statistically different than zero, and secondary effects on remaining public schools, such as competition, are not positive.

Voucher advocates continue to cite the so-called "gold standard studies" promoted by the Friedman Foundation. Remember, the Friedman Foundation is a voucher advocacy group, irresponsibly failing to acknowledge that many limitations that the very authors of these studies warn against in their research have not been posted on their Web site.

Specifically, the studies promoted by the Friedman Foundation failed to report inconsistent findings across these so-called gold standard studies. For example, some of the studies reflect positive gains for some students but not across all grade levels that received the voucher treatment. Some studies that reflect positive impacts do not include all voucher students, leaving out a significant portion of the sample. Also, most positive effects are isolated to a

specific grade level and to a specific student characteristic, and seldom in both reading and math, and across all grade levels.

In other words, results are haphazard, inconsistent, and some of the very authors that are cited in these so-called gold standard studies actually worry about these inconsistent results that should not be used to inform policy decisions.

We already heard the most recent findings from the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program where there was no conclusive evidence of the students that participated after 5 years, and we have also heard about the Louisiana study that recently came out, where we actually see some negative effects on students that actually took on vouchers.

Lastly, Lubienski & Lubienski, and Chris Lubienski has testified before this committee, looked at a study that has looked at public versus traditional school achievement, has indicated that when we control for specific characteristics, that public schools in general outperform kids that are in private schools.

I will provide more recommendations in the question and answer session. Thank you for your time.

[The statement of Mr. Huerta follows:]

Testimony prepared by Professor Luis A. Huerta for the hearing on
"Expanding Educational Opportunity Through School Choice"

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce

February 3, 2016

Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits:

An Analysis of Claims, Assumptions and Evidence

*Luis A. Huerta**
Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy
Teachers College – Columbia University
huerta@tc.columbia.edu

*The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author and should not be attributed to or seen as representing the position of Teachers College – Columbia University or any other organization with which he is affiliated.

***1.)* CLAIM: Private schools are more cost effective and efficient at educating all students, compared to public schools.**

ASSUMPTION: This claim equates private school tuition with the cost of educating students, and assumes that private schools can educate all students (including special education and limited English proficient) more cost effectively then public schools.

This claim fails to acknowledge that cost differentials, including services provided and types of students that are served, are important in fully accounting for the real cost of voucher and tuition tax credit programs.

EVIDENCE: *Private schools are not more cost effective and efficient at educating all students, compared to public schools.* Voucher and tuition tax credit program advocates have stated that private school choice will lower total education spending because private schools typically spend less per pupil than comparable public schools do.[1] However, a closer examination of private school operations suggests that using per-pupil expenditures to estimate the potential cost of voucher programs is inappropriate.

Any measure of immediate fiscal and educational impacts of voucher or tuition tax credit programs must account for significant cost differentials compared to a comprehensive public school system in order to account for the real cost of voucher and tuition tax credit programs.[2] Measuring the cost effectiveness of private schools must weigh the quality and amount of services provided to all students, including: the number and types of students served (e.g. special education, limited English proficient, vocational education); church subsidies and endowments; low-cost facilities and low-wage teachers; and administrative and financial burdens of operating the choice programs.[3]

In addition, measuring efficiency must also weigh the challenges of taking voucher and tuition tax credit programs to scale. Increased demand for private schooling will require participating private schools to address the needs of diverse student bodies and provide services equivalent to the public school system if they are to remain competitive.

Lastly, measuring efficiency is also dependent on whether the wider goals of a public and democratic education system are upheld by all schools, including citizenship training and workforce preparation.

---

[1] Coleman, J., & Hoffer, T. (1987). *Public and private high schools: The impact of communities.* New York: Basic Books; Hoxby, C. (1998). What do America's "traditional" forms of school choice teach us about school choice reform? *Federal Reserve Bank of New York Economic Policy Review, 4*(1), 47-59.
[2] Levin, H.M. & C. Driver. (1997). Costs of an Educational Voucher System. *Education Economics.* 5, 303-311.
[3] McEwan, P. (2000). The potential impact of large scale voucher programs. *Review of Education Research.* 70(2): 103-149.

2.) CLAIM: Voucher and tuition tax credit programs will enhance school choice by making private school tuition more affordable and increasing access for all students.

ASSUMPTION: This claim assumes that voucher and tuition tax credit programs offer an adequate economic incentive to offset the price of private school tuition for all families. Also, there is no guarantee that private schools might respond, instead, by boosting tuition levels, rather than admitting additional students.

This claim fails to acknowledge that the expansion of private school choice is more dependent on the criteria schools use in choosing students, and less dependent on giving parents the ability to choose schools.

EVIDENCE: *Tuition tax credit scholarship amounts may be insufficient for a free private education.* In addition to diverting public money to private schools, a tuition tax credit may not provide scholarship amounts sufficient to cover full tuition at private schools. Tuition subsidies or tax credit scholarships awarded to students through scholarship tuition organizations (STO) average $3,252.[4] However, private schools who choose to participate and accept a public scholarship are not required to accept the amount in exchange for full tuition, unlike voucher programs that require private schools to accept publically funded vouchers in exchange for full tuition. Private school tuition rates are not regulated by states nor do states collect accurate information on private school tuition rates. Without an accurate account of actual tuition costs, parents are not informed of additional costs they must bear, thus scholarship amounts may result in only a partial payment for what is guaranteed by most state constitutions as a free public education.

Tuition elasticity is dependent on which private schools participate, the subsidy amount, and the types of students that private schools admit.
Evidence describing the effects of tax subsidies and vouchers on the elasticity of tuition prices is limited.[5] Current programs that offer direct tax credit or deduction benefits to parents in

[4] Tax credit programs (including tax credit scholarships and individual tax credit/deduction programs) have been proposed in over 45 states and 29 programs are now operating in 19 states (Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Virginia).[4] Most of the existing programs became operational in the late 1990s and have expanded significantly over the last ten years. See Workman, E. (2012). *Vouchers, Scholarship Tax Credits, and Individual Tax Credits and Deductions*, Education Commission of the States. Retrieved on September 4, 2013 from http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=10528; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014. *School Vouchers*, Retrieved on August 2, 2014 from: http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-choice-vouchers.aspx; Friedman Foundation, *School Choice in America*, Retrieved on January 26, 2016 from:http://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/school-choice-in-america/

[5] See Huerta, L. A. & d'Entremont, C. (2007). Education tuition tax credits in a post-*Zelman* era: Legal, political and policy alternative to vouchers? *Educational Policy*, January/March 21(1), 73-109.; d'Entremont, C. & Huerta, L. A. (2007). Irreconcilable differences? Education vouchers and the suburban response; Jacobs, M. J. (1980). Tuition tax credits for elementary and secondary education: Some new evidence on who would benefit. *Journal of Education Finance,* 5:233-245. Jain, P. (2002). *The approval barrier to suburban charter schools*. Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.; Augenblick, J. & McGuire. K (1982). *Tuition tax credits: Their impact on the states*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States; Longanecker, D. A. (1983.) The public costs of tuition tax credits. in *Public dollars for private schools: The case of tuition tax credits* (pp. 115-129), edited by Thomas James and Henry M. Levin. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press; Gemello, J. M. & J. W. Osman. (1982). *Analysis of the choice for public and private education*. Washington DC: Institute for Research on Educational

exchange for private school expenses, may not offer tuition tax credits large enough to stimulate responses from private schools (e.g. Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and six other states). However, tuition tax credit programs that include a scholarship tuition organization mechanism that award tax credit scholarships/vouchers directly to students (e.g. Arizona, Pennsylvania, Florida and thirteen other states), provide a larger public subsidy to families, which may impact a supply-side response that influences tuition prices. Because states do not regulate tuition prices, families that use the benefit to enter private schools today, may not have sufficient residual income to pay a tuition increase in the future. Lastly, student-level indicators that identify the characteristics of voucher or tuition tax credits beneficiaries that private schools choose to admit, are insufficient (e.g. are private schools accepting the same rate of special education, English language learners and other students with special needs?). These are all important factors that may impact tuition elasticity, but for which we have insufficient data, as a result of limited or non-existent data collections effort by states.

Supply side response depends more on criteria schools use in choosing students, and less on giving parents the ability to choose schools. Another relevant issue is whether private schools have the capacity to respond to increased demand if tuition tax credits or vouchers are scaled-up (the supply-side response) and whether a pent-up demand for private school options exists from parents (the demand–side response). These supply and demand issues raise the question of how large a benefit is needed to elicit a response from both private schools and the parents who may want to enroll their children. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been active in lobbying for tuition subsidies, and it is also realistic in acknowledging that a much larger benefit is needed to entice families to exit public schools. At the state level, the Minnesota Catholic Conference explains that Catholic schools could only begin to increase the supply of available seats through capital expansion if subsidy amounts were in the range of $12,000 to $14,000 (equivalent to approx. $14,200 - $16,500 in 2014 dollars). [6] [7] Private schools also recognize that quality and fidelity to their mission is heavily influenced by school size and make-up of the student body, thus private schools may not want to scale-up even if an adequate subsidy amount were provided by the state.[8]

This speaks to an important supply-side behavior that school choice advocates often choose to overlook: expansion of private school choice is more dependent on the criteria schools use in choosing students, and less dependent on giving parents the ability to choose schools.

Finance and Governance. ; Catterall, J. S., & Levin, H. M. (1982). *Public and private schools: Evidence on tuition tax credits.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Institute for Educational Research on Educational Finance and Governance.

[6] Noll, personal communication May 18, 2006

[7] Adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator, see http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

[8] Noll, personal communication May 18, 2006

3.) CLAIM: Publicly funded private school choice will yield a market-based accountability system based on parents' preferences that does not require public accountability of private schools.

ASSUMPTION: This claim assumes private schools will advance a uniform education system that advances equity, social cohesion and democratic citizenship, where all students are presented with similar opportunities to learn standardized skills and content as well as gain access to varying perspectives.

This claim fails to acknowledge that voucher and tuition tax credit subsidies for private school tuition may encourage families to segregate themselves into school communities with competing value systems.

EVIDENCE: The majority of voucher and tuition tax credit programs across states expressly prohibit or limit the ability of the government to administer basic oversight and accountability measures on private schools.[9] No oversight of private schools pales in comparison to the accountability systems that govern public schools and guarantee they are held to account—including administration and accountability systems, teacher accreditation and teacher quality standards, testing and accountability, and curriculum standards—which private schools are exempt from.

By prohibiting the state from engaging in due diligence and oversight of private schools, voucher and tuition tax credit programs threaten public authority and the ability of states to insure a uniform education system that advances equity, social cohesion and democratic citizenship.[10] Thus, voucher and tuition tax credit programs contest the common school model and shift attention away from established public goals such as citizenship training and workforce preparation.[11] These tenets are echoed in *Brown v. Board of Education*, where the Court stated that education is important "to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities .... It is the very foundation of good citizenship."[12]

---

[9] In 2015, a total of 26 voucher programs were operating in 14 states (Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia. All the existing voucher programs are targeted to a specific student population, including low-income students, student enrolled in low performing schools, students with disabilities and students residing in districts with no public schools. Ten states and fourteen programs requires private schools that accept voucher students to administer statewide or other assessments (five programs require nationally norm referenced tests). See Workman, E. (2012). *Vouchers, Scholarship Tax Credits, and Individual Tax Credits and Deductions*, Education Commission of the States. Retrieved on September 4, 2013 from http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=10528; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014. *School Vouchers*, Retrieved on August 2, 2014 from: http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-choice-vouchers.aspx; Friedman Foundation, *School Choice in America*, Retrieved on January 26, 2016 from:http://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/school-choice-in-america/

[10] Levin, H. M. (2002). A comprehensive framework for evaluating educational vouchers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*, 159-174.

[11] See Huerta, L. A. & d'Entremont, C. (2007). Education tuition tax credits in a post-*Zelman* era: Legal, political and policy alternative to vouchers? *Educational Policy*, January/March 21(1), 73-109.; d'Entremont, C. & Huerta, L. A. (2007). Irreconcilable differences? Education vouchers and the suburban response. *Educational Policy*, January/March 21(1), 40-72.

[12] 347- 20 -U.S. 483, 493, 74 S.Ct. 686, 691, 98 L.Ed. 873, 880 (1954) cited in *Bush v. Holmes*, 919 So.2d

4.) CLAIM: Private schools are more effective then public schools in addressing students' academic needs and improving students' educational outcomes.

ASSUMPTION: This claim assumes that private schools are more effective in serving the educational needs of all students, including special education, English language learners and other students with high needs.

This claim fails to acknowledge that evidence of voucher program effectiveness remains uncertain, highly contested, and unconvincing to policymakers, despite private schools serving students with less diverse needs.

EVIDENCE: *Voucher programs do not guarantee improved educational outcomes.*
Evidence of voucher program effectiveness remains uncertain with inconsistent effects on student academic growth, thus results should be interpreted with caution. For example, different researchers have come to different conclusions about the effectiveness of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) program (the first voucher program enacted in 1989) using different methodologies. Witte (2000) reported no gains for voucher recipients in either math or reading. Also, the majority of studies of the MPCP analyze data collected prior to 1995, when sectarian schools were prohibited from participation.[13] Studies of other publicly funded voucher programs find limited or no positive effects for voucher users. Belfield (2006) compared Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program (CSTP) participants to three control groups—public school students, rejected voucher applicants, and nonusers (which includes former recipients)—and found no differences in academic achievement.[14] Attempts to clarify the effect of vouchers on student achievement through the study of *privately* funded programs have also resulted in mixed findings. Findings from studies of the New York privately funded voucher program have been debated on methodological grounds and remain unresolved.[15]

More recent findings from an evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) found "no conclusive evidence that the OSP affected student achievement" after five years in operation.[16]

---

[13] Witte, J. (2000). *The market approach to education.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. See also Greene, J., Peterson, P., & Du, J. (1999). Effectiveness of school choice: The Milwaukee experiment. *Education and Urban Society, 31*, 190-213; Rouse, C. E. (1998). Private school vouchers and student achievement: An evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 113*, 553-603.

[14] Belfield, C. R. (2006). *The evidence on education vouchers: An application to the Cleveland scholarship and tutoring program.* New York: National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Teachers College–Columbia University. Retrieved June 26, 2014, from http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files; See also, Metcalf, K. K., West, S. D., Legan, N. A., Paul, K. M., & Boone, W. J. (2003). Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program: Summary Report 1998-2002. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University.

[15] Myers, D., Peterson, P., Meyer, D., Chou, J., & Howell, W. G. (2000). *School choice in New York City after two years: An evaluation of the school choice scholarship program.* Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research; Wolf, P., W. Howell, & P. Peterson. (2000). *School Choice in Washington D.C.: An Evaluation After Year One.* Cambridge, MA: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University; Kreuger, A. & Z. Pei. (2004). Another look at the New York school voucher experiment. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 47(5): 658-698; Fuller, B., Huerta, L. A., & Ruenzel, D. (2000). *A costly gamble or serious reform? California's school voucher initiative—Proposition 38.* Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education, University of California.

[16] Wolf, P. , Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Kisida, B., Rizzo, L., Eissa, N., and Carr, M. *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report Executive Summary* (NCEE 2010-4019). Washington, DC:

Lastly, Lubienski & Lubienski (2006) analyzed student performance on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and found that fourth grade public school students outperformed fourth grade private school students once student background characteristics were taken into account.[17]

The lack of conclusive research evidence on existing voucher programs suggests that a non-uniform, parallel system of education is ineffective in providing students with a high quality education.

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. v.

[17] Lubienski, S. T., & Lubienski, C. (2006). School Sector and Academic Achievement: A Multi-Level Analysis of NAEP Mathematics Data. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43 (4), 651-698.

***5.)* CLAIM: Voucher and tuition tax credit programs increase competition between public and private schools, leading to increased quality and efficiency among all schools.**

ASSUMPTION: This claim assumes that private schools will effectively lure students from public schools at such a rate that all schools will compete for student clients. It also assumes that more liberalized tax benefits could increase the demand for private schooling.

This claim fails to acknowledge that private schools cannot be compelled by government to respond to an increased demand for private schooling or to accept all students who chose to transfer to a private school with a voucher or tuition tax credit subsidy. How and whether private schools increase their capacity in response to voucher or tuition tax credit programs and how their response effects the behavior of public schools, is an empirical question that has yielded very limited evidence of true competitive effects.

EVIDENCE: *Voucher and tuition tax credit programs do not increase competition that yields quality and efficiency among all schools.* Comprehensive reviews of the literature on school choice by Belfield and Levin (2005) and McEwan (2004) suggest that competition has a small positive and non-substantive effect on public education outcomes.[18] Belfield and Levin (2005) conclude that, "a one standard deviation increase in competition would probably increase test scores by approximately .1 standard deviations or about four percentiles."[19]

Measurements of voucher effectiveness may occur at either the school or student level. A substantial number of school-level analyses have focused on Florida's now defunct Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), concluding that vouchers targeted to students in low-performing schools create incentives for public schools to improve or risk losing per-pupil funding.[20] While some research finds that the lowest ranked schools improved after the implementation of the Florida OSP, they note that it is difficult to isolate the effects and attribute them solely to the threat of the voucher. It is possible that the stigma of being labeled a failing school, the increased funding for interventions, or other elements including the combination of these policies, led to the improved test scores.[21] The most recent evidence from the evaluation of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTCSP) provides similar inconclusive results on the competitive effects of scholarships/vouchers on traditional public schools.[22]

---

[18] Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (2005). Vouchers and public policy: When ideology trumps evidence. *American Journal of Education,* 111(4): 548-567; McEwan (2004). The Potential Impact of Vouchers. *Peabody Journal of Education,* 79(3): 57-80.

[19] Belfield, C. R., & Levin, H. M. (2005). Vouchers and public policy: When ideology trumps evidence. *American Journal of Education,* 111(4): 548-567, p. 139

[20] See Greene, J., & Winters, M. (2003). *When schools compete: The effects of vouchers on Florida public school achievement.* New York: Manhattan Institute. Retrieved June 21, 2006, from http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_02.htm; Rouse, C. E. and Barrow, L. (2009). School Vouchers and Student Achievement: Recent Evidence and Remaining Questions. Annual Review of Economics 1, 17-42 DOI:10.1146/annurev.economis.050708.143354; West, M., & Peterson, P. (2005). *The efficacy of choice threats within school accountability systems: Results from legislatively induced experiments.* Paper presented at the annual conference of the Royal Economic Society, Nottingham University, UK.

[21] Rouse, C. E., Hannaway, J., Goldhaber, D. & Figlio, D. (2013). Feeling the Florida Heat? How Low-Performing Schools Respond to Voucher and Accountability Pressure. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 5(2): 251-81.

[22] Figlio, D. N. and Hart, C. M.D. (2011) Does Competition Improve Public Schools? *Education Next* 11 (1), 74-80. Retrieved from http://educationnext.org/does-competition-improve-public-schools/

CLAIM: Tuition tax credits provide publicly funded benefits for private school tuition without affecting education or other public service budgets.

ASSUMPTION: This claim assumes that tuition tax credits are not public revenues and are cost neutral to both education and other public service budgets.

This claim fails to acknowledge that while education budgets may not be directly affected by a tax credit, all state programs may have to compete for limited state resources which are drawn from state treasuries.

EVIDENCE: *Tuition tax credits are public funds diverted to private schools.* The diversion of private resources in the form of individual and corporate donations that flow to scholarship funding organizations (STO) is premised on a tax liability that is owed to the state. The credits that are returned to the taxpayer represent foregone tax revenue owed to a state, thereby decreasing available revenue and adversely impacting state budgets. This essentially allows a corporate or individual taxpayer to designate some of their taxes owed to tuition for private schools as opposed to other state needs. The diversion of funds legally owed to the state by means of a tax credit renders them public funds.

Recent examples of ruling from courts in Arizona, Illinois and Alabama are divergent on whether the private money of tax credit beneficiaries that flows to private schools (or scholarship tuition organizations) constitutes "public money." [23]

[23] See *Dr. Daniel Boyd et al v. Julie P. Magee et al*, 2014, Circuit Court of Montgomery County, Alabama Case No. 03-CV-2013-901470.00. p. 10; *Griffith v. Bower*, 2001. No money ever enters the state's control as a result of this tax credit. Rather, the Act allows Illinois parents to keep more of their own money to spend on the education of their children as they see fit and thereby seeks to assist those parents in meeting the rising costs of educating their children (*Griffith v. Bower*, 747 N.E. 2d 423. IL App. Ct. 2001).

Luis A. Huerta
Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy
Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis
Teachers College - Columbia University
525 West 120th Street, Box 11
New York, NY 10027
ph: 212-678-4199 fax: 212-678-3589
email: lhuerta@tc.columbia.edu

Background and Qualifications

I have worked in education as a teacher/practitioner, researcher, policy analyst and professor since 1990. During this time, I have gained insight on how school organizations work and how policy demands effect the daily operation of schools and the actors within schools, including students, teachers, administrators and parents. My research and scholarship focus on school choice reforms and school finance policy. My research on school choice reforms examines policies that advance both decentralized and market models of schooling—including charter schools, homeschooling, tuition tax credits, vouchers and virtual/cyber schools. My research also examines school finance policy and research with a specific focus on how legal and legislative battles over finance equity in schools and the research that has analyzed the effects of resources on student achievement, have consistently overlooked how resources are used within schools.

My research on school choice and school finance have been published widely in scholarly journals and books, including: *Educational Policy*, *Journal of Education Finance, Teachers College Record*, *Peabody Journal of Education, Journal of Education Policy* and *Phi Delta Kappan*. I recently serve as co-editor of the journal, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. (See CV for full list of publications)

Lastly, my research and commentary have been featured widely in the national print media, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *The San Francisco Chronicle, The London Times* and *Education Week*.

Chairman KLINE. Thank you. Ms. Merriweather, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF DENISHA MERRIWEATHER, STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Good morning. Thank you so much for having me today. It is an esteemed honor to share my story with everyone.

When I was growing up, college was a dream that I did not even know I had, and if it was not for the educational option Florida gave me 12 years ago, I would not be sitting here today.

If you were to rewind my life back when I was in elementary school, you would see someone totally different, someone who was disruptive, the teachers dreaded having come through the door, someone who got into physical fights with her classmates, someone who was destined to drop out before she made it to high school, but thankfully, I did not become a statistic.

Growing up, I was a student who did not pick up concepts and ideas very quickly, and I struggled to keep up with my classmates. I moved around town constantly when I lived with my biological mother, and consequently, that meant I missed a lot of days of school, my grades were terrible, and everything seemed to go down hill.

Each time I moved, it was very hard for me to adjust to my different school, the different teachers, different classmates. I got picked on by students because I was doing so poorly in school. I was often bullied. I kept getting into fights, and to make matters worse, I ended up failing the third grade not once but twice.

All too well, it seemed my future was mapped out for me. I would follow in the footsteps of my mother, my brother, and my uncle, who all dropped out of school.

I hated going to school, and it was a nightmare. I thought school was a punishment for being the kid. One of the first things my godmother wanted to do when I began to live with her permanently the summer before my 6th grade year, was to find a better school environment for me, and that is when she heard about Esprit de Corps Center for Learning, a small private school in Jacksonville, Florida, but she could not afford the tuition.

A friend of hers told her about the tax credit scholarship program, Step Up for Students. Although she had to pay a little bit more to go along with the scholarship, she was willing to sacrifice for my education. And to be honest, Esprit de Corps was just the change I needed.

Before I even stepped foot on my new school's campus, I met with one of the teachers there, and she helped me to learn my times tables with my reading because it was so low, and some other concepts that I could not grasp. When I started at Esprit de Corps in the 6th grade, the adjustment was fairly smooth because of the extra attention that I received.

This class size was so small, I only had eight students in my class, and it was awesome because the teachers could walk around and ask us questions about things that we had questions on and things we did not know we had questions on.

As the time at Esprit de Corps passed, by the first semester, my grades went from Ds and Fs to As and Bs, and I continued to make the Honor Roll constantly.

I say here to you guys today that Esprit de Corps really changed my life. It gave me a new perspective on education, and it gave me a passion to want to learn. They even helped me to fund my ACT, SAT, and college application fees.

The motto at Esprit de Corps is a school where learning is a joy, excellence is the norm, and superiority is our goal, and that was insistently graved into me. Although when I first started at Esprit de Corps, I was behind, it became a competition, and I wanted to meet their expectations.

In 2010, I became the first in my family to graduate from high school, and in 2014, I became the first in my family to earn my Bachelor's degree, and in 2017, I will be the first to earn my graduate degree.

The cycle of poverty is ending in my family because of the Florida tax credit scholarship. I received a quality education and because of my example, my siblings are now seeing how to take advantage of educational opportunities that come their way.

I am committed to advocating for educational options because so many doors have been opened for me, and I want to create those same open doors for other students. I have seen the power of tailored education demonstrated in my own life, and I would like to see it expanded in future generations and in this one.

It has proven to be effective in my life, school choice, and I am so thankful to share my story with you guys today. Thank you so much.

[The statement of Ms. Merriweather follows:]

Denisha Merriweather

Good morning! Thank you for your time this morning. My name is Denisha Merriweather, and I am just entering my second semester in graduate school at the University of South Florida, where I will be receiving my master's degree in Social Work.

When I was growing up, college was a dream that I didn't even know I had. And if it weren't for an educational option Florida gave me 12 years ago, I wouldn't be here today. If you were to rewind my life back to my childhood, you would see someone very different. You would see someone who got in fights with her classmates. Someone destined to drop out before she made it through high school. Someone who didn't even know what college was. But thankfully, I did not become a statistic. Growing up, I was not a student who picked up ideas and concepts quickly in class. School didn't come easily to me and I struggled to keep up.

When I was in elementary school in Jacksonville, Florida, my mother and I were moving around town constantly. That meant I kept changing schools, and I had a hard time re-adjusting to a new school, new teachers and new students every time we moved. Because we moved so much, I also missed several days of school, and when I got back into the classroom, it was hard to catch up. Needless to say, my grades were bad, and I didn't understand most of my schoolwork. I got picked on by other kids because I was doing so poorly in school. And I kept getting into fights. I failed third grade. Not once, but twice.

All too well, it seemed my future was mapped out for me. I would follow in the footsteps of my mother, uncle and brother who all dropped out of school. I was unmotivated and learning became a nightmare- a punishment for being a child. Not too long after that, I started living with my godmother and my life began to turn in an entirely different direction. One of the first things she wanted to change was my school. She heard through our church about a private school in Jacksonville called Esprit de Corps Center for Learning, and liked what she heard. But she had no way to pay for it.

Thankfully, she heard about a scholarship that was offered through a nonprofit I now know as Step Up For Students, and the state program, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship. Let me tell you. That was just the change I needed. Before I even set foot on my new school's campus, I met my teacher. In fact, the summer before I started attending Esprit de Corps, she worked with me to get me up to speed on the things I had missed at my other school. I would go to her house almost every day over the summer to work on my multiplication tables and go over other subjects that I hadn't grasped. It was so nice to have a teacher who truly cared. The following August, I began the sixth grade at Esprit de Corps, and for the first time in my life, adjusting to a new school was a very positive experience for me!

The classes were very small – I had just eight other students in my sixth grade class. It really helped me because my teacher was able to go around to each of us and help us with any questions we had. As the years at Esprit de Corps went on, my grades improved. I began to earn A's and B's consistently, and proudly made the honor roll. I also grew very close to my classmates and it began to feel like a family. I bonded with much younger students and by the time I was a senior, they looked up to me. I can say to all of you here, Esprit de Corps truly changed my life.

The school gave me a new perspective, and helped me prepare for my future. They helped me pay for the SAT, ACT and college applications, and pushed me to expect more from myself. The motto at Esprit de Corps Center for Learning is this: "Learning is a joy, excellence is the norm and superiority is our goal." And I think about that every day. If I hadn't had the opportunity to attend Esprit de Corps, I don't think I would have ever learned what my potential is. No one in my family ever went to college, and the mindset was that if school gets too hard, you just quit.

But since Esprit de Corps expects excellence, I rose to the challenge. In 2010, I became the first in my family to graduate from high. In 2014, I became the first to receive my bachelor's degree and in 2017 I will be the first in my family to graduate with a graduate degree. The cycle of poverty is ending in my family, thanks to the Florida Tax-Credit Scholarship. I received a quality education and my sibling are now seeing how to take advantage of every educational opportunity.

At the University of South Florida, I am receiving my master's degree in social work and I am committed to advocating for educational options. So many opportunities have been given to me and I want to create the same for other children just like me. I have seen the power of a tailored education demonstrated in my own life, and I'd love to see it carried throughout future generations. It is truly an honor to share my story with you all today. Thank you!

Chairman KLINE. Thank you. A fantastic story, thank you very much for sharing that. We are going to start questioning. I am going to yield my time to someone who has been working on school choice for apparently two or three lifetimes, Mr. Messer. I yield my time to you.

Mr. MESSER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You are a man of your word. Thank you for holding this hearing. You are a great advocate for kids and have spent a career as an advocate for educational choice opportunities.

Ms. Merriweather, I am moved by your story. As somebody who has worked very hard on these issues in Indiana before my time in Congress, I have talked to hundreds of people who have a story just like yours. It is part of why I have so much passion for this issue.

You know, there are several reasons that I am so passionate about school choice. Part of it is I believe it is the civil rights issue of our time. It gets to the essence of the American idea, this idea in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, that we all are endowed by our creator with the right to pursue happiness. In modern life, we take that as your opportunity to live the American dream. To have that dream a reality in modern America, it all starts with an education.

Secondly, I am passionate about this because, you know, there is a lot in this debate that is complicated, but there are some things that are not very complicated. To me, what is not very complicated is this: if we want to determine what the best option is for a child, we ought to ask their parents. The best way to determine what is the best path for a child's future is to let that parent decide what is the best option for them.

I have seen in Indiana what happens when those options open up. In Indiana, we now have 200,000 families, 200,000 kids, who are taking advantage of educational opportunities through vouchers, through charters, through public school choice opportunities, virtual school, and the like.

It is amazing, as Mr. Bryan talked about, as he has seen in North Carolina. When the families come—each year, we have a rally at our state house where thousands of families show up. They are part of this program and advocating for it to continue in the future. Those families are a mosaic of our state. Every race, color, and creed, religion, economic background, all just looking for an opportunity to have their shot at the American dream.

You know, today's conversation will no doubt talk about a lot of the complexities that come with providing educational opportunities for kids in America, what is the appropriate role of the Federal Government, what's the pitfalls, philosophical concerns.

All that debate is legitimate; right? We all need to remember as we work through that debate that as we wait, as we frankly dither, millions of kids in this country are going to go to a school today where they do not really have a chance to succeed, and we can do better. We can make sure that every kid in America has a chance.

So now, with that, and again I appreciate the chairman giving me the opportunity to start here, you know, it is interesting as we talk about statistics, one of the things that has changed as this

movement, as Mr. Robinson talked about, has evolved, is the popularity of these programs.

A recent poll came out, released just a few days ago, by the Beck Research and the American Federation for Children, and it says choice programs, educational choice are favored, 74 percent of parents favor these options, 23 percent oppose. Seventy-six percent of African Americans favor, 20 oppose. Seventy-six percent of Latino's favor, 21 oppose. Millennials now, 75 percent favor.

Mr. Robinson, could you talk a little, why do you think these programs—why do you think parents support school choice?

Mr. ROBINSON. Parents support school choice because they simply want what is best for their own children. You know, it is interesting that education may be one of the few human endeavors where the customers' voice at times seems not to matter. In other places, if customers say I do not want to buy your product, guess what, in some places, your business is going to actually cease to exist.

When we ask parents what kind of school do you want, they want a school that has strong academics, a school that is safe, so what parents have done simply is to say we would like to have access to the tax dollars we invest in our system. Remember, it is the taxpayers' money, and they see that it is important.

I had a chance, in fact, I moved to Milwaukee for two years to study where at that time had the most robust three sector initiatives in the nation, one-third of its school age population decided not to enroll themselves in the traditional public school system.

It was not because they did not like public schools. It was because they liked parental options. I think often we overuse the conjunction "or," it is either "private school or public school," when really it is an "and" aspect. They like it because it is making a great difference.

When you look today and realize there is over 27,000 students enrolled in Milwaukee where in 1990 there were a few hundred students at several schools, that is not by accident.

It was mentioned earlier about supply side. Be very clear. If there is a demand, there will be a supply. There has been a growth in the private schools that have grown in Milwaukee and other cities that have taken place, even Washington, D.C. where you have a healthy market, we have seen changes.

Mr. MESSER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to today's debate.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. I thought I was going to have to gavel down my own time there for just a minute. Mr. Scott, you are recognized.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin questioning, I would like to submit three letters for the record by national groups in opposition to using public funds for private schools. One from the National School Boards Association, one from Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and a final one from the National Coalition for Public Education.

Chairman KLINE. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

www.nsba.org
Phone: 703.838.NSBA Fax: 703.683.7590
1680 Duke Street Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3493

February 3, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Senior Democratic Member

Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: "Expanding Educational Opportunity through School Choice" Hearing

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), representing more than 90,000 local school board members across the nation, working with and through our state associations, is writing to acknowledge today's hearing that seeks to examine school choice and discuss how federal policies can support such efforts.

As you explore school choice throughout our communities, we urge you to examine the range of choices that are offered by our nation's public school districts, which educate more than fifty million students. From local magnet schools and charter schools authorized by local school boards to public specialty schools, such as military academies and those offering specialized curricula for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), many of our public school districts provide several options for the success of our students.

NSBA has long held the position that public funds should not be used directly or indirectly through tax credits, vouchers, or a choice system to fund education at any elementary and/or secondary private, parochial, or home school. NSBA supports local community public schools and unconditionally opposes vouchers, tuition tax credits and similar schemes, including charter schools not approved by local school boards. In fact, NSBA's Center for Public Education recently published a report on "School Choice: What the Research Says," which analyzes school choice in all its permutations:

- Choice within the public school system (magnet and charter schools, inter- and intra-district transfers, and traditional neighborhood schools);
- Choice outside the public schools (private schools, vouchers and tax credits, homeschooling); and,
- Virtual schools, which can be either public or private.

We hope that this report will inform the ongoing conversation about the efficacy of school choice in our nation's efforts to assure every child is prepared for college, careers and citizenship.

As you discuss options for supporting school choice, please note the following:

- *Choice in itself may not produce better outcomes.* While many schools of choice do an exemplary job, the results are not universally better than those produced by traditional public schools.

- *Non-public school choice is not a panacea.* Policymakers who are considering supporting parents who wish to choose private schools or homeschooling should be aware that very little is known about the overall efficacy of schooling outside of public schools.

- *Expanding charter schools is not an overall reform strategy.* Most charter schools are no better than their traditional public school counterparts. Merely having more of them will not raise performance. Rather, policymakers and educators should focus on learning from successful local public schools and districts about policies and practices that can help improve all schools.

Moreover, the numerous options for educational choice provided by our public school districts promote success in student achievement and school performance, preparing our students for college and careers. The attached examples of effective public school choice are indicative of how vital our public school districts are to their respective communities, economies and the nation in expanding opportunities for our students, as future leaders and practitioners in numerous sectors.

We appreciate this opportunity to highlight the successful and diverse programs of study offered by many of our public school districts, which help advance both equity and excellence to support our school boards in their efforts to provide the high-quality public education that all children deserve and need to be successful adults and citizens.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Gentzel
Executive Director

Attachments:

- *"School Choice: What the Research Says," Center for Public Education, National School Boards Association, October 2015*
- *Examples of successful programs for school choice in our public school districts*

Center for Public Education
SCHOOL CHOICE
What the Research Says
OCTOBER 2015
National School Boards Association
cpe
Center for Public Education

A School Choice Primer

Giving parents and students the ability to choose their school is promoted by supporters as the key to improving American education overall. On the surface, the idea has great appeal. Who, after all, opposes having choices? Indeed, both Republican and Democratic policymakers have embraced school choice in various forms that range from opening up alternatives within the public school system to providing taxpayer dollars to students to take to private schools. School choice is currently showing up in the 2016 presidential race, too, as a major plank in the education platform of several candidates. For this reason alone, American voters should be asking: Does school choice live up to its supporters' claims?

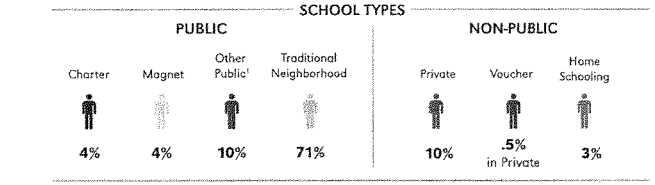
NSBA's Center for Public Education seeks to find an answer in this at-a-glance overview of school choice in all its permutations: choice within the public school system (magnet and charter schools, inter- and intra-district transfers, and traditional neighborhood schools); choice outside the public schools (private schools, vouchers and tax credits, homeschooling); and virtual schools which can be either public or private. In the following pages, we describe each alternative, provide a quick look at state policies related to it, and calculate the proportion of the school-age population served. Finally, we distill what research says about its impact on student achievement.

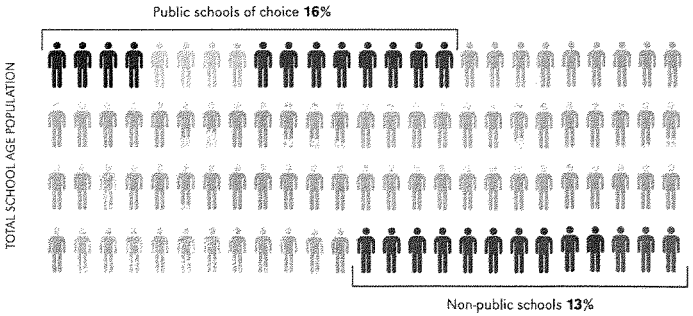
In general, we find that school choices work for some students sometimes, are worse for some students sometimes, and are usually no better or worse than traditional public schools. We hope that this report will inform the ongoing conversation about the efficacy of school choice in the nation's efforts to assure every child is prepared for college, careers and citizenship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REALITY CHECK

After more than two decades of choice polices, enrollments in schools of choice are still relatively small. **87%** of all school-aged children are **in public schools.**





[1]*Other public includes inter- and intra-district transfers*

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEFINITION

Public Schools

Every state provides a free, public education that is available to every school-age child in the state. Every state also has compulsory education laws, typically for children between ages 5-7 & 16-18.

STATE POLICY

Public schools must meet all local, state & federal accountability standards.

ENROLLMENT

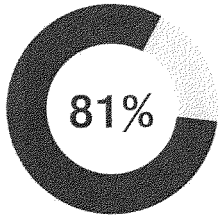
Public schools serve **87%** of the school-aged population.

IMPACT Public Schools

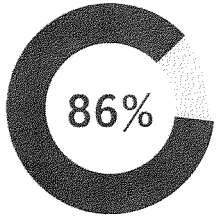
2011-12

By many measures, public schools are performing better than ever. High school graduation rates are at historic highs as is the math performance of 4th and 8th graders. Most public school students still attend traditional neighborhood schools, but they are being given more choices like magnet schools and charters within the public education system.

81% of public high school students graduated on time.



By age 24, **86%** had earned a diploma.



Between 2011-13, 4th and 8th grade public school students continued their gains in math; 8th graders also posted gains in reading.

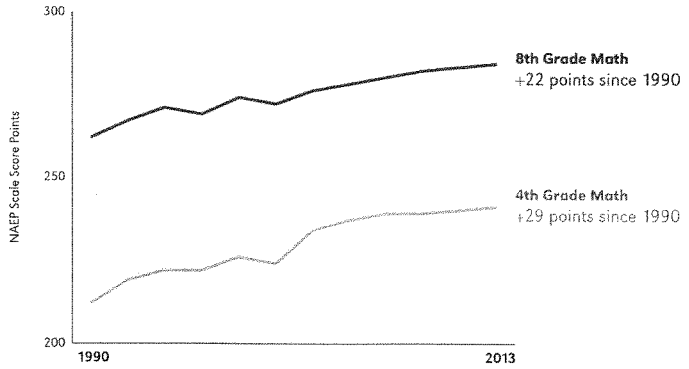
Source: NAEP 2013

IMPACT

Public Schools

Public School Student Gains on NAEP-Math
1990-2013

Today's public school 4th & 8th graders are performing over two years ahead in math compared to their peers in 1990. They are reading about a half year ahead.



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress 2013. 10 points on the NAEP scale is about one year's worth of learning.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEFINITION

Magnet Schools

Public schools with specialized courses or curriculum. They can have admissions requirements, but they must meet local, state & federal accountability standards.

STATE POLICY

48 states have magnet schools

ENROLLMENT

About **4%** of all school-age children are in magnet schools.

IMPACT

Study results are somewhat mixed. Some show higher performance while others show similar results for magnet and non-magnet students.

IMPACT

Several studies have shown higher graduation rates for magnet students, especially for those in Career Academies — career focused high school programs.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DEFINITION

Charter Schools

Public schools with some autonomy in exchange for having to periodically renew their charter. Charter schools have open enrollment, cannot charge tuition, and must meet local, state & federal accountability standards.

STATE POLICY

41 states have charter schools

School boards authorize slightly more than half of all charters.

ENROLLMENT

Charters serve about **4%** of all school-age children.

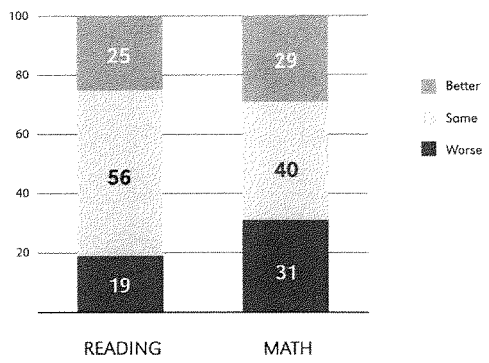
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

IMPACT

Charter Schools

1 in 4 charter schools outperformed its traditional counterpart in reading. More than half performed about the same.

Charter Schools Performance Compared To Traditional Public School Counterpart



Source: CREDO, 2013

Charter school elementary & middle school students do somewhat better on average than their peers. Not so in high school. The benefits seem to be greater for low-income students, ELLs and students of color.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

DEFINITION

Private Schools

Not free. Selective. Not open to every student.
No public accountability for student performance.

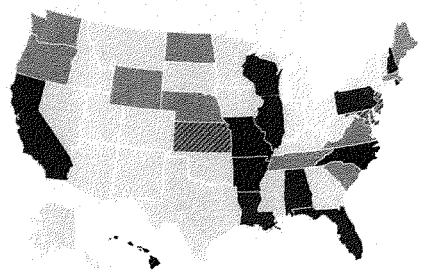
ENROLLMENT

Private School Students

Enroll about **10%** of total school-aged population, which has been consistent for the last four decades.

STATE POLICY

- States that require private schools to register with state Department of Education
- States that require registration for specific private schools
- States that allow private schools to be recognized by state Board of Education



Source: US Department of Education, 2009

IMPACT

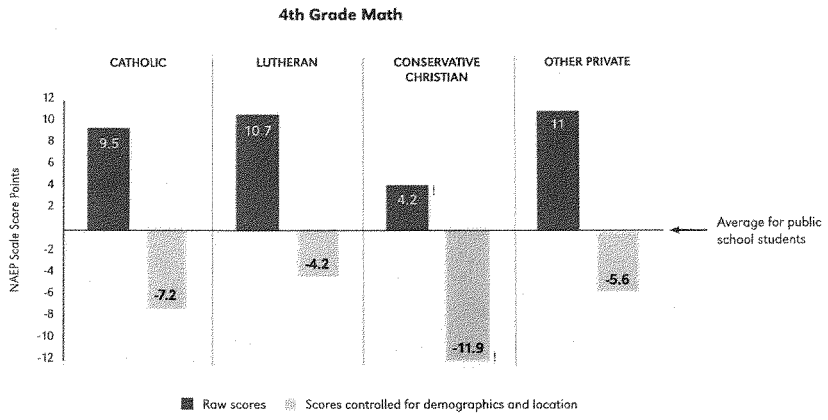
Private school students score somewhat higher on NAEP than their public school peers, but the gap has been narrowing.

IMPACT

Private Schools

Public Versus Private School Performance

Private school students tend to outperform public school students on NAEP. But when researchers Lubienski & Lubienski controlled for student race, ethnicity & family income, they found the opposite – that in most cases, 4th and 8th grade public school students had the advantage in math scores over students in different kinds of private schools.



! Not statistically significant; interpret with caution

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

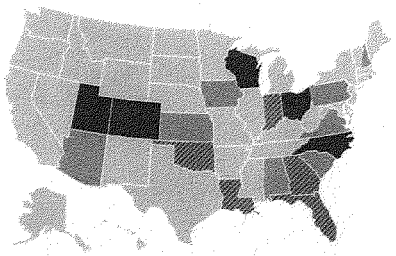
DEFINITION

Vouchers & Tuition Tax Credits

Taxpayer-funded scholarships that subsidize student tuition at private schools. Typically available to targeted groups, such as low-income students, those attending chronically low-performing schools, students with disabilities, or students in foster care.

STATE POLICY

Offer vouchers Offer tuition tax credits Offers both



ENROLLMENT

Voucher Students

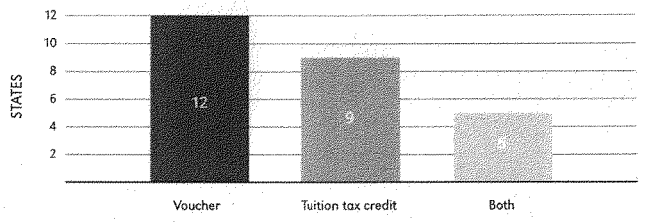
Voucher students comprise less than **½ of 1%** of all school-age children.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

STATE POLICY

Vouchers & Tuition Tax Credits

Across the country there are **38** voucher/tax credit programs in **21** states.



Accountability varies greatly by program; **20** require participating students to take standardized assessments while **18** have no accountability for student performance.

IMPACT

Some studies report test score gains for low-income, African American students, but most show similar performance as public school students for other student groups.

Several studies have found voucher recipients are more likely to graduate from high school.

Generalizing findings is difficult because programs tend to be small and many students use vouchers for only a few years.

DEFINITION

Homeschooling

Students are taught at home by parents or tutors who determine content; virtual schooling can be a part of instruction.

STATE POLICY

13 states & DC have requirements for homeschool instructors; some require certain subjects

23 states & DC require testing for homeschooled students

14 states define performance thresholds

ENROLLMENT

Homeschoolers comprise **3%** of the total school-aged population.

IMPACT Homeschooling

IMPACT UNKNOWN

There is little reliable research on homeschooled students; consequently, little is known about them as a group.

Most studies are anecdotal or based on self-selected, self-reporting surveys.

Some small studies suggest higher SAT/ACT scores and college-going rates for home schooled students; how well these studies represent homeschoolers overall is unknown.

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

DEFINITION

Virtual Schools

Either public or private online schools. Can be either fully virtual or "blend" online & face to face instruction. Courses are purchased from private providers or developed by states and school districts.

STATE POLICY

30 states & DC operate virtual schools

ENROLLMENT

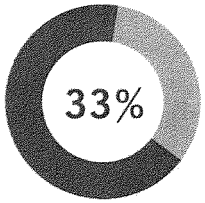
Enrollments are growing but currently serve less than **½** of **1%** of total school-age population.

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

IMPACT

Virtual Schools

In 2012-13, only **33%** of virtual schools with state performance ratings were deemed academically acceptable.



Virtual charter schools in PA, MN & OH perform worse than their brick and mortar counterparts

On-time graduation rates for full-time virtual schools are about half the national average

Studies suggest that students taking AP or other high-level courses online do well

Credit recovery is the most common reason students take online courses, but the overall effect is hard to determine.

Other Forms of School Choice

- **Inter- and Intra-district transfers:** Over 20 states allow students to transfer within or between school districts to other public schools. The combination of inter- and intra-district transfers with magnet and charter school enrollments shows that about 16% of school-age children attend a public school of their choice.

- **Education Savings Accounts:** Education Savings Accounts (ESA) are similar to vouchers in that qualifying families receive a portion of state funds for educating their child. They differ in that the dollars are deposited in a privately managed account and can be used for tutoring, curriculum and other approved services as well as for private school tuition.

  Arizona and Florida were the first states to initiate small-scale ESA programs for special needs students. Arizona also offers ESAs to students in low-performing schools. This spring, Nevada passed an ESA bill that represents the most far-reaching school choice program in the nation. Nevada will provide a large part of the state per-pupil allocation in the form of an ESA to students who are currently enrolled in Nevada public schools but wish to leave. Experts estimate that about 93% of all school-age children in the state would be eligible for an ESA. Nevada will begin distributing ESAs in January 2016.

Take-aways

- **There's no reason to conclude that choice in itself will produce better outcomes.** While many schools of choice do an exemplary job, the results aren't universally better than those produced by traditional public schools.

- **Non-public school choice should come with warning labels.** Policymakers who are considering supporting parents who wish to choose private schools or homeschooling should be aware that very little is known about the overall efficacy of schooling outside of public schools.

- **Expanding charter schools is not an overall reform strategy.** Most charter schools are no better than their traditional public school counterparts. Merely having more of them will not raise performance. Rather, policymakers and educators should focus on learning from successful charter schools about policies and practices that can help improve all schools.

What Can School Boards Do?

- Establish opportunities for sharing lessons learned between your traditional, magnet and charter schools. Learning from successes in your various programs can bolster the education provided all students in your district.
- Provide an adequate infrastructure for monitoring your students in virtual schools. Digital learning is the wave of the future and will have a central place in public education. But school boards need to make sure that it is done right so that students do not get lost in cyberspace.
- Establish policies for granting and revoking charters based on academic performance. Make sure these policies are well-known in order to attract stronger applications.

A Disclosure

The Center for Public Education is an initiative of the National School Boards Association (NSBA). While we have sought to be as objective as possible in this report, readers should be aware that NSBA has official positions on school choice, as follows:

- **Public education choice:** NSBA supports "locally elected school boards in expanding public school choices to meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing world." This support extends to charter schools as long as the local school board "retains sole authority" to grant and revoke charters.
- **Non-public education choice:** NSBA "recognizes and upholds the right of any group to establish and maintain schools so long as such schools are fully financed by their own supporters." At the same time, NSBA believes public tax dollars should "only support public schools" and opposes "vouchers, tax credits, and tax subsidies for use at non-public K-12 schools." NSBA further believes that "private and home schools should be subject to governmental regulation that assures a minimum standard of instruction under state law and adherence to the Constitution and laws of the United States."

Acknowledgments

We want to thank Patricia Campbell, CPE's Spring 2014 intern, for her contribution to this report.

The Center for Public Education is a national resource for credible and practical information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. CPE provides up-to-date research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage public support for public schools. CPE is an initiative of the National School Boards Association.
www.centerforpubliceducation.org

Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is a not-for-profit organization representing state associations of school boards and their more than 90,000 local school board members throughout the U.S. Working with and through our state associations, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. www.nsba.org

Bibliography

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

National Center for Education Statistics, Public School Enrollments Projections, Condition of Education 2015, U.S. Department of Education. Data for 2012-13 year: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cga.asp

National Center for Education Statistics, Compulsory School Attendance Laws by State, 2015, U.S. Department of Education: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_1.asp

National Center for Education Statistics, Public School High School Graduation Rates, Condition of Education 2015, U.S. Department of Education. Data for 2011-12: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp

National Center for Education Statistics, Nations Report Card 2013 Mathematics and Reading, U.S. Department of Education: http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/#/performance-overview

MAGNET SCHOOLS

National Center for Education Statistics, Number and Enrollment of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by School Level, Type, and Charter and Magnet status: Selected years, 1990-91 through 2010-11, U.S. Department of Education: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_108.asp

Betts, Julian, Kitmitto, Levin, Bos & Eaton, What Happens When Schools Become Magnet Schools? American Institutes for Research, May 2015: http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Magnet-Schools-Diversity-and-Achievement-May-2015-rev.pdf

Jerald, Craig J, Keeping Kids in School, 2007, Center for Public Education: http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Keeping-kids-in-school-At-a-glance/default.aspx

Miami-Dade Public Schools, A Review of the Research on Magnet Schools, January 2012: http://www.magnet.edu/files/documents/review-of-research-on-magnet-schools.pdf

CHARTER SCHOOLS

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Total number of charter school students 2013-14: http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/students/page/overview/year/2014 . Total number of charter schools by state: http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/schools/page/overview/year/2014

Center for Research on Education Outcomes, National Charter School Study, 2013, Stanford University. http://credo.stanford.edu/documents/NCSS%202013%20Final%20Draft.pdf

Hull, Jim, Charter Schools: Finding Out the Facts, March 2010, Center for Public Education: http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Charter-schools-Finding-out-the-facts-At-a-glance

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Enrollments, 2011-12, Condition of Education 2015, U.S. Department of Education: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgc.asp

U.S. Department of Education, State Regulation of Private Schools, 2009 https://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/regprivschl/regprivschl.pdf

National Assessment of Educational Progress, Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling, 2006, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education: https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006461.pdf

Yettick, Holly, "Public schools outperform private schools, book says," Education Week, May 13, 2014 http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/14/31publicprivate.h33.html

Lubienski & Lubienski, The Public School Advantage: Why Public Schools Outperform Private Schools, University of Chicago Press, 2014

VOUCHERS

American Federation for Children Growth Fund, School Choice Yearbook, 2014-15 http://afcgrowthfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/AFC_2014-15_Yearbook.pdf

Gill, Brian, Timpane, Ross, Brewer & Booker, Rhetoric Versus Reality: What we know and what we need to know about vouchers and charter schools, 2007, RAND Education: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/RAND_MR1118-1.pdf

Kober & Usher, Keeping Informed About School Vouchers: A review of major developments and research. Center on Education Policy, 2011: http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=369

Wolf, Patrick, Guttman, Puma Kisida, Rizzon, Elissa & Carr, Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Final Report, June 2010, U.S. Department of Education: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104019.pdf

Wolf, Patrick, "Lost Opportunities," Fall 2009, Education Next: http://educationnext.org/lost-opportunities/

VIRTUAL SCHOOLS

Barth, Patte, Hull & St. Andrie, Searching for the Reality of Virtual Schools, May 2013, Center for Public Education: http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Searching-for-the-reality-of-virtual-schools-at-a-glance/Searching-for-the-reality-of-virtual-schools-full-report.pdf

Evergreen Education Group, Keeping Pace, 2013-14: http://www.kpk12.com/states/

Miron, Gary, Gulosino & Horvitz, Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2014: Politics, Performance, Policy and Research Evidence, National Education Policy Center: http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/virtual-2014-3-inventory-final.pdf

HOMESCHOOLING

Fulton, Mary, State Policies on Homeschooling, October 2009, Education Commission of States: http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/82/30/8230.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013, Table 206.10 (2012 data), U.S. Department of Education: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_206.10.asp?current=yes

U.S. Department of Education, State Regulation of Private Schools, 2009 https://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/regprivschl/regprivschl.pdf

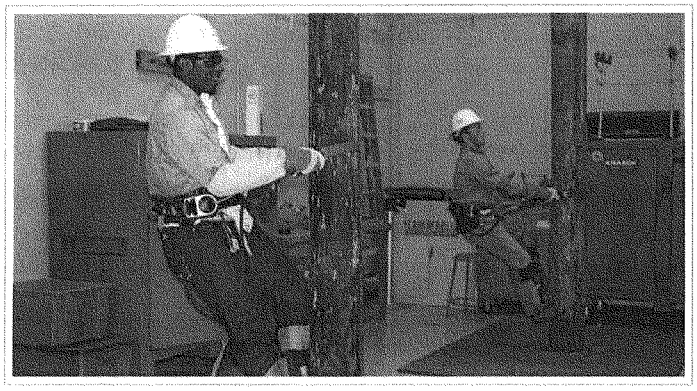
OTHER: INTER/INTRA-DISTRICT CHOICE, ESAS

National Center for Education Statistics, Trends in School Choice 1992-2007, U.S. Department of Education: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010004.pdf

Cunningham, "Nevada enacts nation's most expansive school choice program," June 10, 2014, National Conference of State Legislatures: http://www.ncsl.org/blog/2015/06/10/nevada-enacts-nations-most-expansive-school-choice-program.aspx

National School Boards Association

Westar Energy at Kanza Education and Science Park



Topeka Public Schools, Topeka, KS

About the Program

Topeka Public Schools is an inner-city school district with a diverse student population. In 2010, the district purchased 152 acres of land that would become the Kanza Education and Science Park. Westar Energy was in need of a new substation location and a competent and career-ready workforce. Faced with the challenges of filling STEM-related job openings, Westar formed a partnership with Topeka. The district now has a 152-acre outdoor classroom for hands-on learning. Teachers have aligned lessons to Common Core standards. Westar color-coded the substation so that it can be used to teach students about the flow of energy. Nearby, there are information kiosks and multilevel seating so that the substation can be used as an outdoor classroom. Westar also provides many educational experiences, including curriculum development, academic pathways, job shadowing, internships, and scholarships.

Results

The Westar partnership has expanded educational and career opportunities for Topeka students. Programs as a result of the partnership include Young Entrepreneurs internships, the Westar Corporate Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, educational summer camps, the construction of a wind turbine, an environmental science

research lab, teacher externships for the creation of Lesson in a Box, Electrify Your Future events (where students are exposed to various energy industry careers), Optimize Your Future (where students learn about the craft arena), field trips, and after-school programs.

The Board's Involvement

The school board was instrumental in purchasing the land and forming the partnership with Westar Energy. With careers becoming increasing dependent on a STEM foundation, the board has been particularly receptive to ideas that will better prepare students for this reality. The board has supported many of the initiatives proposed for the Kanza property. With the encouragement of the school board, Westar signed on to provide educational resources that otherwise would not have been available.

Contact

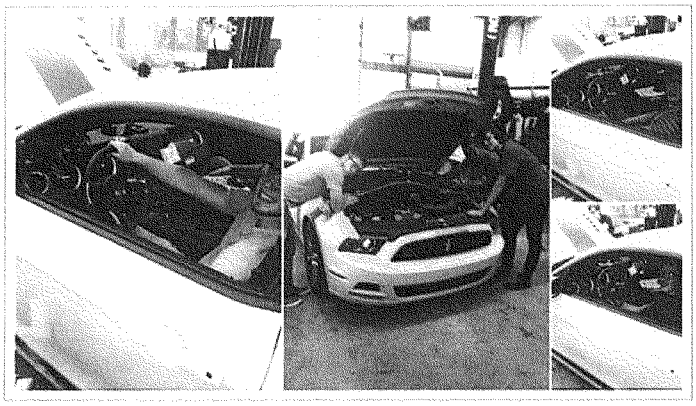
Megan Ackerman
Communications Specialist
mackerm@topeka.k12.ks.us
www.topekapublicschools.net

Helpful Links:

Topeka Public Schools

National School Boards Association

Future Ready



Career and technical education gets a 21st century reboot

Michelle Healy

Students in Janet Harris' digital media, video editing, and television broadcasting classes are making a name for themselves with an online broadcast service. They produce, direct, and record more than 50 live programs (mostly sports, but also leadership and community service activities) each year for Deer Creek High School in Edmond, Oklahoma.

Fans include students and family members who turn to the student-run service (known as AntlerVision) when they can't attend live campus events.

"It's a great service to the school community," and through it, "my students are being prepared for the workforce and they're getting jobs like crazy," says Harris. She teaches the course at Deer Creek for Francis Tuttle Technology Center, the regional career and technology education (CTE) school.

Among those students is Chris White, 17, one of several hired by OKPreps, a Tulsa-based sports broadcasting company, to shoot video and provide coverage during a 900-game national youth basketball championship in Dallas.

White, who says his real passion is computers, turned a summer internship at OKPreps into a paid, part-time job programming and coding software used for the company's streaming platform.

"I really like making videos, which is producing good content, so I put a lot of time into it," says the 11th-grader, an executive producer on this year's AntlerVision staff. But instead of a career behind a camera or calling the shots at ESPN someday, he's contemplating a future in computer technology after college. He credits career tech with putting him on this path.

"The job in broadcast (helped) me learn that there's a whole range of things you can build software for," he says. "I love building software that works with media."

The Skills Gap

Giving students such hands-on experiences where they can put into context what they learn in the studio, workshop, lab, and classroom, while also developing employability skills suited for the global economy and the digital age, is key to high-quality CTE, says Sean Lynch, a spokesman for the Association of Career and Technical Education.

Lynch and other career-tech advocates say that over the past 30 years, this educational model has evolved considerably from the days of focusing solely on vocational training for various trades to preparing students for success in college and careers and giving them the foundation to further their education later.

Driving this transformation? "More and more business and industry leaders pointing to a disconnect in available positions and qualified professionals available to fill them," commonly referred to as the skills gap, says Lynch. "And they're looking to CTE programs to partner with to provide (the needed) learning opportunities earlier and to raise awareness that these jobs are out there."

From national, state, and local government levels to various education and professional groups, "there has been a concerted effort to really put career and technical education more in the 21st rather than in the mid-20th century," says James Stone, director of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education.

"When you think about college and career readiness, which is the current mantra in education circles, the career readiness piece screams for career and technical education."

Among those advocating the benefits of high-quality CTE: former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who has characterized CTE programs as "helping to connect students with the high-demand science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) -- where so many good jobs are waiting."

21st Century Reboots

That's the thinking in Utah, where the State Office of Education launched the new Utah Aerospace Pathways program in September. The pilot program, currently offered to students in several high schools in the Granite and Davis school districts, aims to increase the workforce building precision components for the airline industry, the military, and space exploration.

Participants will earn a certificate in aerospace manufacturing, complete a paid internship, and become eligible for a job at one of six industry partners: Boeing, Harris, Hexcel, Hill Air Force Base, Janicki, and Orbital ATK. They also can receive tuition reimbursement for college after a year of employment.

The companies joined together to propose the program to state economic development officials to address the region's need for more skilled aerospace workers, says Doug Livingston, technology and engineering education specialist for the Utah State Office of Education.

"They were essentially competing for the same employees and there just are not enough" to meet current and anticipated workforce demands, he says.

At Harford Technical High School in Bel Air, Maryland, the former computer networking and technology program has gotten a 21st century reboot into a cybersecurity program. Students study malware, viruses, and data security, along with ethics and moral philosophy in a digital age, en route to earning a range of industry-level certifications while still in high school.

Because of the job market, "we have not only increased the certifications, but also the rigor of the course," says Harford Principal Charles Hagan. "And we're trying to teach them not only what to do and how to do it, but also the ethics part of it."

STEM Boost

With the growing importance of STEM education to high-demand job opportunities, New Jersey's Camden County Technical Schools (CCTS) have boosted their STEM-related career options to include programs in pre-engineering, green engineering, information technology, and environmental science.

With sponsorship and engineering support from the Campbell Soup Company (its world headquarters just minutes away), Camden County Technical Schools' pre-engineering program participates in the nation-wide FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics competition, one of several national competitions designed to let CTE students in various career pathways -- from engineering to entrepreneurship and business to skilled trades -- display their knowledge and know-how.

However, "students from just about every career area on campus" contribute to the Camden County robotics entry, says Marianne Cappello, CTE supervisor.

For last year's competition, medical arts students developed a safety and hazard mitigation plan; business technology students created a cost analysis report; carpentry students constructed a practice field for testing the robot; and cosmetology students handled promotions and team support, to name just a few of the departmental contributors. Even the team's teacher-coaches (hailing from the engineering, masonry, and automotive technology departments) reflected the cross-curricular approach to the effort.

College-Bound CTE

Although students enrolled in CTE programs often earn certificates and industry-recognized credentials while still in high school, they are increasingly participating in dual or concurrent enrollment programs that allow them to take college-level courses either at their school or on a nearby college campus and earn credit.

Students at Camden County Technical Schools, for example, can apply to earn dual credit with Camden County College, an opportunity that gets them a head start on college while saving money because the tuition is waived for high school students, says Cappello.

And it's an outdated notion that CTE is not suited for the needs of college-bound students, she says, noting that Camden County, like similar high-quality programs, gives students an invaluable look at their chosen career path along with access to challenging college prep and core academic classes.

"There's no other opportunity in a public high school where students can get the hands-on training and in-depth knowledge" about what it's like to be a carpenter, a chef, or a future engineer, says Cappello.

To help drive that lesson home, sophomores in the pre-engineering program at Francis Tuttle, for example, take a principles of engineering class "to learn about the different phases of engineering and the rigor it takes to accomplish that," says Superintendent Thomas Friedemann.

The center's Pre-Engineering, Biosciences and Medicine, and Computer Science Academies "are as rigorous as any college prep high school you could go to," says Friedemann. "That's something the old 'Vo Tech' system would never have gotten involved with."

In Indiana, the South Bend Community School Corporation is working to extend the early college concept to CTE students studying skilled professions. In a program launched in 2014, the district allows high school juniors in the automotive services program to attend Ivy Tech Community College and work toward a technical certification while also earning dual credit for college-level math and language arts classes that are taught at their home school, all at no cost.

At the end of the program, students can earn the technical certificate and their high school diploma, and have 37 dual credits, explains Laura Marzotto, CTE director.

"We have a high need for automotive workers in our region, so this feeds right into the local need," she says.

It also encourages students who might otherwise have been satisfied to simply take "a couple of automotive classes" to work harder in their language arts and math classes because completing them is tied to getting the technical certificate. "If we can offer them more (education) in high school and get them out into the work force or into college, that's our goal," says Marzotto.

Filling the Skills Gap

A similar early college initiative, also aimed at meeting local employment needs, targets students in the fire science program. It is a combined effort among the school district, the community college, and the South Bend Fire Department. Graduates earn community college credits, high school credits, HAZMAT, EMT, and fire-fighting industry certifications, and participate in a fire department-taught training program.

Graduates interested in joining the fire department "will still have to apply, like everyone else, and undergo more training," says Marzotto, "but they'll come in highly recommended if they do well in the program."

Plans are in the works to add three to four new CTE early college programs in the next year or so to help fill the skills gap, and the hope is that employers will help these students continue their education during the course of their careers, she says, "because you can't have enough today."

*Michelle Healy (**mhealy@nsba.org**) is a staff writer for* American School Board Journal.

AMERICANS UNITED
FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Maggie Garrett
Legislative Director

(202) 466-3234 x226
(202) 898-0955 (fax)
garrett@au.org

1901 L Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

February 2, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Private School Vouchers Do Not Offer Real Educational Opportunity

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

Tomorrow, the House Education and Workforce will hold a hearing on "Expanding Educational Opportunity through School Choice." On behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, representing over 120,000 members and supporters in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, we write to explain that private school vouchers do not offer students and their families real educational opportunity. In addition, private school vouchers raise constitutional and civil rights concerns and have simply proven ineffective.

Private School Voucher Programs Predominantly Fund Religious Schools

Private school vouchers predominantly fund students to attend private, religious schools. In fact, for the 2012-2013 school year, 98% of schools in Indiana voucher program[1] and 96% of schools in the Milwaukee voucher program[2] were religious. In 2014 the Department of Education found that 62% of D.C. voucher schools were religious, but when that data was weighted by the number of students served in each school, the religiously affiliated schools rose to 81% of all voucher schools.[3]

---

[1] Ind. Dept. of Ed., Choice Scholarship Program Annual Report, Jan. 27, 2014, http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/choice/choice-scholarship-program-annual-report-012714.pdf; Andrew D. Catt, *Exploring Indiana's Private Education Sector*, Friedman Foundation, http://www.edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/1074/Exploring-Indianas-Private-Education-Sector.pdf (In 2013-2014, 306 of 317 private schools participating in the state's voucher program were religious; 55% of those schools were Catholic).

[2] Public Policy Forum, Research Brief: Choice Schools Have Much In Common with MPS, Including School Performance Vol. 101 No. 1 Feb 2013, *available at* http://publicpolicyforum.org/sites/default/files/2013VoucherBrief-Clarified_1.pdf.

[3] U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: An Early Look at Applicants and Participating Schools Under the SOAR Act*, 10, 29 (2014).

Most religious primary and secondary schools are part of the ministry of the sponsoring church. Because these schools either cannot or do not wish to separate the religious components of the education they offer from their academic programs, it is impossible to prevent a publicly funded voucher from paying for these institutions' religious activities and education. This conflicts with one of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty—the government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree. Vouchers also threaten the religious liberty and autonomy of religious schools, as vouchers open them up to government audits, monitoring, control, and interference from which they would otherwise be exempt.

Furthermore, these schools—even when accepting taxpayer funded vouchers—often discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and, in some programs, admission. A central principle of our constitutional order, however, is that "the Constitution does not permit the State to aid discrimination."[4] In addition to raising constitutional concerns, federally subsidized religious discrimination raises significant public policy concerns. When funding any school, whether public or private, the government should not surrender the longstanding principle of equal treatment for all.

Private School Voucher Programs Deny Students Civil Rights and Constitutional Protections

Voucher programs also strip students of civil rights protections. Despite receiving public funds, the private schools participating in voucher programs usually do not abide by all the federal civil rights laws and public accountability standards that public schools must meet, including those in Title VI, Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Students who attend private schools with vouchers are also stripped of their First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights provided to them in public schools. Schools that do not provide students with these basic civil rights protections should not be funded with taxpayer dollars.

Private School Voucher Programs Fail to Improve Educational Outcomes

According to multiple studies of the District of Columbia,[5] Milwaukee,[6] and Cleveland[7] school voucher programs, students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and

---

[4] *Norwood v. Harrison*, 413 U.S. 455, 465-66 (1973).

[5] U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report* (June 2010) (Though the 2009 study showed a marginal gain for some students in reading (but notably, not for the program's targeted group, students from schools in need of improvement), the 2010 Final Report said "[t]here is no conclusive evidence that the [program] affected student achievement" and earlier findings of modest gains "could be due to chance" and were no longer statistically significant.); U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 3 Years* (Apr. 2009); U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 2 Years* (June 2008); U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 1 Year* (June 2007).

[6] Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report* (Apr. 2010); Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Second Year Report* (Mar. 2009); Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP*

math than students in public schools. And, a recent study of the Louisiana voucher program revealed that students with vouchers actually performed worse on standardized tests – as much 50% worse in math scores in particular – than their peers not in the voucher program.[8]

Voucher programs also fail to offer participating students greater educational resources. In fact, the Department of Education studies of the D.C. voucher show that students participating in the program are actually *less* likely to have access to ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, cafeterias, and nurse's offices than students not in the program. An annual survey of the Milwaukee voucher program conducted in 2013 found that out of 110 Milwaukee voucher schools surveyed, 39 reported having no art, music, physical education, library or technology specialist teachers.[9]

Private School Voucher Programs Lack Accountability

Many voucher schools take taxpayer money without having teacher, testing, or achievement requirements. And, they often lack the proper mechanisms to account for how the money is actually being spent. For example, U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports from both 2007 and 2013 document the D.C. voucher program's repeated failure to meet basic and even statutorily required accountability standards.[10]

Other state voucher programs have similar problems. In Indiana, voucher schools had to give up $4 million they were wrongly given.[11] In Florida, voucher schools have been found to be taking program money for kids not even attending those schools.[12] In Wisconsin, the

---

Longitudinal Education Growth Study Baseline Report (Feb. 2008); Witte, *Achievement Effects of Milwaukee Voucher Program* (Feb. 1997); Witte, et al., *Fifth Year Report Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* (Dec. 1995).

[7] Plucker, et al., *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004* (Feb. 2006); *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Executive Report 1998-2002* (Feb. 2006).

[8] Morgan Winsor, *Louisiana's Controversial Voucher Program Harms Poor Students, Lowers Grades, New Study Finds* (Jan. 10, 2016), INT'L BUS. TIMES, http://www.ibtimes.com/louisianas-controversial-voucher-program-harms-poor-students-lowers-grades-new-study-2258417.

[9] Public Policy Forum, Research Brief: Choice Schools Have Much In Common with MPS, Including School Performance Vol. 101 No. 1 Feb 2013 available at http://publicpolicyforum.org/sites/default/files/2013VoucherBrief-Clarified_1.pdf

[10] U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Actions Needed to Address Weaknesses in Administration and Oversight, Publication No. GAO-13-805 (Nov. 2013) http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/658416.pdf [hereinafter 2013 GAO Report]; US Gov't Accountability Office, District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operations, Pub. No. 08-9 at 26 (Nov. 2007) http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf [hereinafter 2007 GAO Report].

[11] Stephanie Wang, *Private Schools Return $3.9M for Voucher Miscalculations*, INDYSTAR (Dec. 17, 2014), http://www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2014/12/17/private-schools-return-voucher-miscalculations/20561325/.

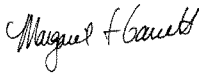
[12] Gus Garcia-Roberts, *McKay Scholarship Program Sparks a Cottage Industry of Fraud and Chaos*, MIAMI NEW TIMES (Jun. 23, 2011), http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2011-06-23/news/mckay-scholarship-program-sparks-a-cottage-industry-of-fraud-and-chaos/full/.

state paid $139 million to schools that failed to meet the state's requirements for operation.[13] The Wisconsin voucher program has other accountability problems such as employing teachers with no education background or teacher credentials and operating voucher schools out of old factories, strip malls, or car dealerships.[14]

Conclusion

The government should fund public schools rather than funnel taxpayer funds to private schools that lack accountability, religious liberty, and civil rights standards—and most importantly, do not meet the goals of helping students most in need. Accordingly, we oppose private school voucher programs.

Sincerely,



Maggie Garrett
Legislative Director
Americans United for Separation of Church and State

[13] Dave Zweifel, *Plain Talk: Wisconsin's School Vouchers Ae a Scam*, THE CAPITAL TIMES (Sept. 4, 2013), http://m.host.madison.com/news/local/education/local_schools/state-paid-million-to-schools-terminated-from-voucher-program-since/article_d4277f72-51ca-5da3-b63d-df2a7834569b.html?mobile_touch=true

[14] Ruth Conniff, *Voucher School Tour*, THE PROGRESSIVE (Aug. 18, 2014), http://www.progressive.org/news/2014/08/187790/voucher-school-tour

The National Coalition
for
Public Education

February 2, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Education and the Workforce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: NCPE Opposes Private School Vouchers

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

The 56 undersigned organizations submit this letter for the hearing "Expanding Educational Opportunity through School Choice" to express our strong opposition to private school vouchers. Vouchers divert desperately-needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few, select students, with limited, if any, real impact on student academic achievement. Instead of providing equal access to high quality education or setting high standards for accountability, voucher programs have proven ineffective, lack accountability to taxpayers, and deprive students of rights provided to public school students. Congress would better serve *all* children by using funds to make public schools stronger and safer than by creating a new voucher program.

Although promoted as "school choice," private school vouchers do not provide real choice for students and parents. The "choice" in voucher programs actually lies with private schools, which may turn students away for a variety of reasons. In contrast, public schools are open to all.

Students with disabilities are particularly underserved by voucher programs. Vouchers place students in private schools that do not have to follow the same inclusionary practices as public schools, allowing students with disabilities to be isolated from their nondisabled peers. And, students are often unable to find the same level of service in private schools as they do in public schools. For example, in D.C., a significant number of students who received a voucher had to reject their vouchers because they were unable to find a participating school that offered services for their learning or physical disability or other special needs.[1]

[1] U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report* 24-26 (June 2010) [hereinafter *Final Report*].

Vouchers also fail to improve academic opportunities. According to multiple studies of the D.C.,[2] Milwaukee,[3] and Cleveland[4] school voucher programs, students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students in public schools. In fact, the Department of Education studies of the D.C. voucher program show that students participating in the program are actually *less* likely to have access to ESL programs, learning support and special needs programs, tutors, counselors, cafeterias, and nurse's offices than students not in the program.

Moreover, voucher programs offer little accountability to taxpayers. Private school voucher programs usually do not require participating private schools to comply with the same teacher standards, curriculum, reporting, and testing requirements as public schools. And, private schools that receive voucher students do not adhere to all federal civil rights laws, religious freedom protections provided under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and public accountability standards that all public schools must meet, including those in Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and ESEA.

Finally, vouchers violate religious liberty by funding primarily religious schools.[5] One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she *does agree*. Voucher programs, however, violate that central tenet: they use taxpayer money to fund primarily religious education. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another's religious education.

For these reasons and more, we oppose private school vouchers. Congress should ensure that public dollars remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

AASA: The School Superintendents Association
African American Ministers In Action
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Atheists

---

[2] *See, e.g., Final Report* (Though the 2009 study showed a marginal gain for some students in reading (but notably, not for the program's targeted group, students from schools in need of improvement), the 2010 Final Report said "[t]here is no conclusive evidence that the [program] affected student achievement" and earlier findings of modest gains "could be due to chance" and were no longer statistically significant.).

[3] *See, e.g.,* Witte, Wolf, et al., *MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report* (Apr. 2010); Legislative Audit Bureau, *Test Score Data for Pupils in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (Report 4 of 5)*, 17 (Aug. 2011) ("The project's five-year longitudinal study shows no significant difference in the performance of Choice and similar MPS pupils after four years of participation.").

[4] *See, e.g.,* Plucker, et al., *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Summary Report 1998-2004* (Feb. 2006); *Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, Executive Report 1998-2002* (Feb. 2006).

[5] Indeed, approximately 80% of the students participating in the D.C. voucher program attend religious schools. *Final Report* at17-18; Ind. Dept. of Ed., Choice Scholarship Program Annual Report, Jan. 27, 2014, http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/choice/choice-scholarship-program-annual-report-012714.pdf. Reports of other state programs are similar: in the Indiana voucher program, approximately 98% of the schools accepting voucher students were private religious schools, in Milwaukee's voucher program, 96% of all voucher schools were religious, and in Florida's tax credit program, 82% of students attended religious schools. U.S. Andrew D. Catt, *Exploring Indiana's Private Education Sector*, Friedman Foundation, http://www.edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/1074/Exploring-Indianas-Private-Education-Sector.pdf; Public Policy Forum, Research Brief: Choice Schools Have Much In Common with MPS, Including School Performance Vol. 101 No. 1 Feb 2013 *available at* http://publicpolicyforum.org/sites/default/files/2013VoucherBrief-Clarified_1.pdf; Allie Bidwell, *School Vouchers: Legal, Depending on Where You Live*, U.S. NEWS (Aug. 28, 2014), http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/08/28/florida-teachers-parents-sue-state-over-school-voucher-tax-credit.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
AFL-CIO
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Humanist Association
Americans for Democratic Action
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Center for Inquiry
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of the Great City Schools
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Disciples Justice Action Network
Education Law Center - PA
Equal Partners in Faith
Feminist Majority Foundation
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Institute for Science and Human Values
Interfaith Alliance
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Alliance of Black School Educators
NAACP
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Federally Impacted Schools
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
People For the American Way
School Social Work Association of America

Secular Coalition for America
Southern Poverty Law Center
TASH
Texas Faith Network
Texas Freedom Network
Union for Reform Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to make a comment about portability because that has been, I think, misunderstood. This committee already rejected the idea of using Title I funds in private schools, and we also ended up rejecting the idea that the money "followed the child." Well, the money already follows the child. The formula is based on the number of children you have in a particular school.

When you have a straight per capita calculation, you lose the plus up that is in Title I for concentrations of poverty. If you have 15 percent poverty, you get a little more. If you have 30 percent poverty, you get a little more. When you go to a straight per capita allocation, you lose that plus up for poverty, which has the effect of moving money from very low income areas to very high income areas.

We want to make sure that people understand what "portability" meant, and we ended up keeping the formula where it is so that those high concentrations of poverty get more money, and that is the original intent of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Mr. Huerta, we have had studies that show that basically public school choice on average is average. Can you make a comment on that, some are better, some are worse, and on average, they are average?

Mr. HUERTA. First, let me talk about the general numbers we know about, looking at public school student performance versus private school student performance.

The study by Lubienski that I cited using 2003 NAEP, National Assessment of Educational Progress Scores, which public and private school students are assessed on this, clearly indicated—this is only looking at 4th grade students—that students in public schools once controlled for specific characteristics, and this study used individual characteristics such as whether families were reading to their kids at night, and these are characteristics that were not used in previous studies, but the evidence clearly showed that kids in public schools outscored kids that were in private schools.

Now, it is also important to note that public schools are not failing at large. Certainly, there is a crisis in some of our urban areas where we have some failing schools, but I think it is very important to just remind ourselves that public schools are not failing, which is where the majority of our students are in the United States.

With regards to the evidence, just building a little bit more on what I talked about in my testimony, that when it comes to vouchers specifically, we continue to hear advocates talk about these so-called "gold standard studies."

A new study that is just coming out from Lubienski, who I have mentioned already, will be looking point by point to all the 12 or 13 so-called "gold standard studies." I already made some of the points earlier with regard to the uneven impact that we have seen that has been claimed as positive impact by many voucher advocates in a lot of these studies.

The interesting part about these so-called "13 studies" is the very authors of these studies, the majority of them, actually explicitly warn policy makers in using this data to extrapolate and to make any sort of policy decisions because of the unevenness, yet the

Friedman Foundation has taken the liberty to use some of this evidence without acknowledging these very important caveats and warnings that these very authors have actually talked about.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. I have several other questions I want to get in before my time has expired. Do you have evidence to show what portion—you talk about an opportunity, what portion of the students getting vouchers today would already be in private school?

Mr. HUERTA. I am sorry, Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. How many people that get vouchers today would already have been in private school even without the voucher.

Mr. HUERTA. I do not have the exact numbers. It varies by state. There are some states that actually require that kids have actually been enrolled in public schools prior. There are some states that actually allow students to take a voucher even though they have not been previously in private schools. I am sorry, I do not have the exact numbers.

Mr. SCOTT. Is it a school's choice or a student's choice? Do many schools have the opportunity to accept who they want?

Mr. HUERTA. Private schools have the opportunity to accept whomever they want. I think that is very important when I talk about the supply side, this is something that is seldom talked about. Certainly, parents are provided a choice when we expand school choice policies, but we have to acknowledge and remember that states do not have the ability to compel private schools to accept all students.

So, sometimes simply providing students or families a choice, it could be a false choice if there are not any choices available to them.

Chairman KLINE. I am sorry, the gentleman's time has expired. Dr. Foxx?

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Representative Bryan, if you were advising other state leaders seeking to enact and implement choice policies, how would you recommend they proceed, what obstacles can they anticipate, and would you speak to the excellent bipartisan support that you have had in North Carolina, if you would, in your response?

Mr. BRYAN. Thank you, Dr. Foxx. I think the first thing when I was working on a school choice bill was actually seeking out other legislators on the other side of the aisle who I thought might be supportive, and having conversations with them, trying to have conversations with folks across the spectrum, trying to make the issue of school choice less combative and more discussion about how we can create great outcomes for all of our kids.

Even public school advocates who really want every money, every sort of public dollar going to traditional public school acknowledged that we were failing a lot of our kids right now, and they need immediate access to other choices.

I think talking about it in that way is important. I think making sure that you talk to parents and other organizations that care about this issue and making sure they are getting the information they need to make good decisions. I think the primary thing I would say is try to work on it in as bipartisan a manner as possible to create a good outcome for kids.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you. You also said in your testimony that the opportunity scholarships improved public schools and improved student outcomes. Dr. Huerta's testimony questioned those arguments. Could you give us a little bit more information about what the experience has been in North Carolina?

Mr. BRYAN. Sure. I will say as North Carolina's program was challenged, we were just starting, and I think as anyone would acknowledge, when you start a program, you are mostly dealing with anecdotes on the front end not actual data.

I think it is fairly common sense. I talked to our State Board of Education chair recently, and he made a comment that the principal of a traditional school—they had opened a charter in that district, and the principal of the traditional school had gone to talk to all 38 parents who were going to that charter. He said you know, that is exactly what happens when there is another choice for parents, is it makes sure that the people at the traditional school are serving their families well. That is what you want to have happening.

I think when parents have options, it creates the kind of environment where we know that we are serving our students well.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much. Mr. Robinson, perhaps you could add a little bit to what Representative Bryan was saying since North Carolina's experience is fairly new. Would you talk a little bit about the one or two elements, key elements, of school choice policies that strongly influence student outcomes, and you do not have to go into great detail, but if you would point us to some studies or to some results that we could then look at and make a part of the record, that would be helpful to us.

Mr. ROBINSON. Dr. Patrick Wolf at the University of Arkansas has been the principal investigator, one of many, but the lead for the program in Milwaukee and for the opportunity scholarship program here in Washington, D.C. I would take a look at his studies.

Secondly, it would be worth mentioning that the Friedman Foundation did not create the concept of a gold standard. Really, when you are talking about methodological standards, you are looking at control groups and treatment groups. To make sure that there are good points there, I just wanted to mention that.

Having a strong teacher qualified to teach in a school has been one way that we have seen a difference. Secondly, inviting parents and the community to be involved in the process. We have to remember that we cannot expect nor should we expect public schools to do all the work by itself. It takes what I call a civil society approach where there are families, faith based communities, corporations, and others who need to be involved.

There are public schools who are doing this well. We can learn from them in the private sector, and the private sector programs are doing equally as well.

I would also like to add Betts and Tang. They had a 2014 study where they looked at 90—52 value added papers on charter schools, and they actually found in fact there was some improvements as relates to math and reading, particularly over time.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentlelady. Ms. Fudge, you are recognized.

Ms. FUDGE. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today. Ms. Merriweather, my sincere congratulations to you for the work you have done. I represent tens of thousands of children just like you, and certainly hope they have the same opportunity that you had. Congratulations to you.

I am an advocate, as many of you are, for the proposition that all children have access to a quality education. I just wish that my colleagues would fight as much for those with no choice as they do for those who have a choice.

Mr. Bryan, you indicate that the opportunity scholarships improve student outcomes. If this is the case, please explain to me why there is such resistance from private schools to report out data on yearly student performance and on their school and class demographics, just as public schools must.

Mr. BRYAN. Thanks for the question. I think it is fundamentally one of freedom. I think those schools are worried about government sort of being involved. They are all preexisting. One of the things we know about them is that they were existing without the government, and they have other parents there, and they may not want to release data surrounding other students.

Ms. FUDGE. Thank you so much. That is a real shock. They want public money but they want freedom. Is that what you said? They should not report on tax dollars?

Mr. BRYAN. You can have reports on tax dollars, and I think we do, actually, you have to have a certain number of students so that the student data is not made available. There certainly are reports that have to be given on the data of how students are performing.

Ms. FUDGE. Thank you very much. You gave me the perfect answer, freedom. Mr. Robinson, in your testimony, you cite a report by the Friedman Foundation that states the top reasons parents choose a private school for their children were school environment, smaller class sizes, and more individualized attention for students.

Is it safe to say that if public schools had adequate funding to provide more teachers, which would lower class sizes, and more school counselors, classroom aides, and behavior interventions, which we know help, would parents be less inclined to seek out private options?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, parents seek out private options for reasons other than the ones you mentioned, so—

Ms. FUDGE. Did you not say that?

Mr. ROBINSON. What I said was in Georgia, you had Dr. Ben Scafidi—

Ms. FUDGE. Did you say what I just read? Did I misquote you?

Mr. ROBINSON. Yes—no. I said that parents choose it for smaller classroom, intervention, and other factors. The point you had mentioned, if public schools had A, B, or C, would parents leave. That part, I do not know. There are a lot of reasons parents leave. Some of the reasons they left were the ones I cited.

Ms. FUDGE. Thank you. Dr. Huerta, we know that programs provide vouchers to students enrolled in K–12 with a maximum voucher amount, at least in Ohio, of $4,250. Most private schools are significantly higher than that. Really, is there in fact a choice for a parent, even if they receive a voucher, if they do not have the resources to make up the difference? Do they really have a choice?

Mr. HUERTA. I think the choice is limited, and I think one of the things we have seen in places like Milwaukee and especially we are seeing this in Louisiana, one of the newest voucher programs, is that the majority of voucher schools that choose to accept students are the lower quality and not the long-standing private schools.

Certainly, we have a lot of parochial schools which have lower tuitions that are taking on some of these students, but these are the very schools that themselves are now being challenged as the demand has increased on whether the actual voucher amount is sufficient to continue to actually provide services for a more diverse group of students.

In Milwaukee where we see a voucher amount, I think, in the amount of $8,500, and as I mentioned, in Minnesota, the amount needed to actually increase capital facilities in these places is much higher. We are talking in the range of $14,000 to $15,000 in quality private schools.

Ms. FUDGE. Thank you. I am going to close just by saying this, I know that all of my colleagues on both side of the aisle believe in accountability. We hear it every day, whether it be about the budget or some other thing.

I am certainly hopeful they will be on my side as it relates to making sure that we are accountable for the dollars that we take from taxpayers, whether they are in a private school, whether they are in a parochial school. We are responsible to the people of the United States for their resources.

I would certainly hope that we all would be on the same page with that. Secondly, let me just say that I am not really an opponent of charter schools. What I am is a proponent of all schools. I wish we would spend as much time on the schools that educate 95 percent of all our children than the schools that represent 5 percent.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KLINE. The gentlelady yields back. Dr. Roe?

Mr. ROE. Thank you, Chairman. Full disclosure, there are no charter schools in my district. Mr. Robinson, you started out by saying that families make a choice when they move, and you are absolutely right. I remember when I moved my family to Johnson City, Tennessee. I looked for the best public school there was because I had gone to public schools my entire life. I wanted my children to go to good public schools, but I could that because I had the resources to buy a house in that neighborhood.

Ms. Merriweather, whose story was unbelievable and an incredible story, did not have that choice. Fortunately, because someone took an interest and saw real talent in that young woman and invested time in her, she is going to be an advocate for other people. That is one of the most compelling stories I have heard, and a big shout out to you for that.

I do have full disclosure. I do have one son, and all my children went to public schools, but I have one son, with a heavy heart, I have to tell you, has a graduate degree from Vanderbilt. I am very sad about that being a UT graduate.

The point is an education is your ticket out. It is the only chance you have. What I cannot understand, if you are going to a failing school, why anybody would want to keep a child in that school.

Why would you let them try if you are failing, why would you not let that child, whatever you have to do, because they only have one chance, and I can tell you, a parent does not give a hoot about meta-analysis or anything else, what they care about is they want their child safe and they want their child learning, and parents know that. They know when they go to a school—a school has a reputation just like a doctor or lawyer or anything else, and we know where kids go and learn.

Look, I do not know the answer to all this, but I do know the answer is not keeping a kid in a school that is not working for them.

I would like to ask any of you to answer this. What is the role or does the Federal Government have any role in this part of public education, a voucher system? Mr. Robinson, I will start with you. What role do you see for the government? Expand it, shrink it, what is it?

Mr. ROBINSON. It can serve as an encourager. What you decide to do with the ESSA law, letting states have the opportunity to experiment, that is a role. I go back to early in our history where we looked at knowledge, religion, and morality being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

I see the federal role as an encouraging role, one that allows states to do what it can, support where it can, and lead from behind.

Mr. ROE. In our State of Tennessee, we have had the largest gains of any state in the Union. We have moved from the high 40s to 25th now in the country, and that is not high enough. We would like to be number one.

We have made community college free in the state, technical college, free in the state. We have opened those opportunities up for students so that there are no economic barriers now.

I think with Ms. Merriweather's story, her education, her story did not just change her life, and she mentioned it, it changed many other lives and the success she is going to have with her and her family, if she has a family going forward, it will change their lives. Education does not just change one person's life.

The other thing I want to ask is why would a teacher—Dr. Huerta mentioned this—why would a teacher work in a private school for significantly less money? Why would a good teacher do that?

Mr. HUERTA. Would you like me to respond?

Mr. ROE. Yes, sir.

Mr. HUERTA. I think it is for obvious reasons that I sort of stated earlier, and that is we know that private schools are often not educating the diverse groups of students that public schools are responsible for serving. That could make a real difference in the classroom environment, and a variety of other factors within schools.

Can I actually reply to your earlier question?

Mr. ROE. Let me ask this question. My two grandchildren go to a private school, and they do for several reasons, but the tuition at this school is less than what we pay to educate the public. They had a senior class last year whose average ACT score, the class av-

erage, was 29. In our area, that works pretty well. The public school system works very well.

I can certainly understand my friends who are public school teachers and administrators why they do not want the dollars that are already thin moved somewhere else. Also, there has to be accountability and success. Where we are, there are no charter schools, so obviously our public schools are working.

Right here in Washington, D.C., I live across the street from a public school, they are not working. There are kids that are failing and they are spending an enormous amount of money on it, not a little bit of money, an enormous amount for failure.

I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman yields back. Mr. Pocan?

Mr. POCAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to thank you for holding this hearing. Let me just add to the echo, Ms. Merriweather, congratulations and thank you for sharing your story. I think your story is what makes a teacher proud they chose the profession they chose, and it is a testament to what good teachers and small class sizes can do, so thank you for sharing that.

However, unlike Mr. Messer, I think I have a little different experience when it comes to taxpayer funded voucher programs. I spent 14 years in the Wisconsin legislature. I was not around for the creation of the program, but I was around for 14 years of the growth of the program.

Let me just kind of share my perspective of how things worked in Wisconsin. When we first started the program, we had money going to schools where the person who ran the school said he could put his hand on a book and read it. We had money going to schools where they bought Cadillacs with the money for administrators for the program.

From there, some accountability standards came in, but as Ms. Fudge brought out, there is still a problem with accountability and records.

I went to South Division High School in Milwaukee, a public school, with a low graduation rate of about 50 percent, but when a student came from one of these taxpayer funded voucher schools, there there was absolutely no records that came with them, so you were starting with a blank slate, so while there may be freedom for that school, there is no accountability or anything for the student who is trying to go to that high school and how to place that person. That is part of the records that we had.

When I look at the Wisconsin experience, those schools can select their students. We had a real controversy especially with students with disabilities. The American Legislative Exchange Council, which is a corporate bill mill that puts out all these different bills, had a special needs scholarship bill—- sounds just like what North Carolina passed – every disability group in the state opposed it because they know what is going to happen: more dollars will leave the public school system and go to private schools, and only a few children will benefit from that, but in general, the public schools are going to be left with some of the tougher kids, which costs more for the system, and ultimately that hurts public education even more.

They lacked the accountability that I mentioned. We had schools shut down. In Wisconsin alone, we had schools shut down literally overnight that took taxpayer money, and that cost to the taxpayers was about $176 million in the State of Wisconsin. That is the experience that we had.

Ultimately, it diverted resources from our public school system, and it is the government's responsibility to make sure children have access to that opportunity of education.

That was our experience. And then, I remember when Governor Pence came before this committee and I asked him about the rollout in Indiana. I think he said somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of the kids who came into the program already attended a private school.

In Wisconsin, the last expansion we had, 79 percent of the people already attended a private school who went into that program.

That is not so much about education policy, that is really kind of like a tax policy. I guess my question to Dr. Huerta especially, my experience that I am offering from my state, how different, are we the anomaly compared to these other states' experiences, and can you just tell me how that helps public education?

Mr. HUERTA. Mr. Pocan, I do not think Wisconsin is an anomaly. Wisconsin is the longest—Milwaukee is the longest standing voucher program that we have, and it is one of the larger programs.

The issues that you described in detail are being reported in many of the other voucher programs that we have in places like Cleveland and already in Louisiana we are already seeing some of these issues coming forth.

I think you are certainly not an anomaly. If I can actually answer your question with sort of a broader statement that was brought up in the earlier exchange with regard to what the Federal Government can do to begin to address some of these issues, and I think the government needs to ask themselves whether placing the responsibility of educating students is wise, and placing that responsibility on private schools, and we have to remember that equity is not a market value. Private schools are market entities. Equity is not a market value of private schools.

When we talk about issues around accountability and so forth, voucher and tuition tax credit programs threaten public authority and the ability of states to actually ensure that a uniform ed system actually advances equity and social cohesion, and the Democratic citizenship of all students.

When the state does not have the ability to hold private schools to account, we are not able to guarantee that those values are actually engrained in our students.

Mr. POCAN. Thank you. I only have 12 seconds. Mr. Robinson, if you get a chance, because you have had the experience in Wisconsin, give some of those issues that are brought up, really the lack of accountability, the problem when they transfer to a public school, the problem with the children being cherry picked. I would just love to hear you address some of those because I do think those are real valid concerns that I experienced in my home state.

Chairman KLINE. I am sorry, the gentleman's time has expired. Mr. Guthrie?

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Merriweather. Again, I will echo. I think you said you were a South Florida student. Western Kentucky University is in my district or my home town. We got to play in a bowl game. I say that because you hired our coach away from us, beloved Willie Taggart. I hope you have a chance to meet him or his wife because they are fantastic people and class act, and wish him the best, and thanks for coming here today.

You said this opportunity kept you from being a statistic, and it seems as we are listening to this now, you are a statistic because we are talking about 79 percent this, 81 percent that. What we are seeing is lives that change.

I think there was one study, I think, that was quoted that said did not show gains but the worse other than that was on average there are no gains. It gave you an opportunity to find the school that fit for you. I think those are things we have to recognize.

You said also that the voucher or the tax credit did not completely cover your tuition, but it made it affordable for your godmother to be able to make that choice for you. I think a lot of things that we are hearing negative towards choice and use of public funds for giving people other educational opportunities, you seem to be debunking because it seems to fit your life and you are in a graduate program, so we really appreciate you being here and sharing your story because it is important for us to hear.

I worked in the state legislature as well, Mr. Bryan. Thanks for your work. The education area is where I worked. My kids went to public schools. I have one that is a senior in high school, had fantastic opportunities. I think somebody said 95 percent of schools are successful. I do not know what the number is, but a vast number of Kentucky schools are extremely successful.

I will tell you there are some schools that I got to visit that weren't, and I really tried to do a recovery program for schools in distress. We could not do charters or vouchers. That just was not going to happen politically in Kentucky at the time. I think the time is coming.

We were able to do substantial things through bipartisan, and one of my biggest partners in trying to get it through the House was the different Majority than mine, the Urban League. The leader of the Urban League in Lexington saw the schools that typically were inner-city schools, although we have rural schools that have issues and failure.

Now, I think maybe the time has come in Kentucky. We have a new Governor, closely aligned legislature that might move forward on charter schools.

The question—I think there are fair points that were brought up, how do you ensure that private schools do not cherry pick students, how do you ensure that—I agree with Ms. Fudge, we want to make sure that every tax dollar is accountable.

Mr. Robinson, I guess I am just asking you, Kentucky is looking at our charter schools, and when we talk to Governor Bevin or his new Secretary Heiner, what states prevent some of the problems you are talking about and what states do it right, and what should we look at moving forward? We are talking about charter schools and vouchers as we speak.

Mr. ROBINSON. So the issue of cherry picking has been a problem for some places and not others. In most states, they have a lottery. If there are 100 seats and they have 200 applicants, you have a lottery. I have attended lotteries. I have had a chance to pick the balls out or the name. The students who were picked actually enroll. There may be attritions and students may leave, but we are not cherry picking every single kid. With 2.9 million kids, a lottery is one way to take care of that.

Number two, some students choose to leave a charter school either because (a) it is just not a good fit, same reason they left a traditional school. Some choose to leave because they want to go to another school that has a program that is better aligned.

I will not get into which state is better or not. That will probably get me in some trouble.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Just some model states. I do not want to say what is better.

Mr. ROBINSON. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, they have a report where they have ranked all of the states, and you've got Minnesota, you have other states. I would say take a look at their ranking. They rank on several criteria. Some states are doing really well.

If you want to be a strong charter school state, make sure you have a lottery in place, make sure we fully fund charter schools. It is a myth that charter schools are receiving all the funding that traditional schools are sending, and before we have conversations about fully funding public education, let's truly fund all public schools including charter schools.

Mr. GUTHRIE. I am about out of time. Ms. Merriweather, again, I had a lady that worked in a factory, was managing a factory, and a lady who dropped out of high school, talked her into going back. She said the biggest effect on her going back to school was her daughter. You say your siblings are moving forward.

My question is you are in your graduate program, what is next for you?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Thank you so much.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Looking for a job?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Yes, I am actually getting my Master's in social work. Every time I tell someone it is befitting because of my family dynamics and me wanting to make a change in my family, and yes, my siblings are now seeing my example, and even other members in my family, my biological mother, she often tells me, you know, thank you so much, you really inspire me and I am so happy that I actually gave you basically to my godmother in order for her to impart into me.

It was really amazing that I could get the tax credit scholarship and my younger siblings are now receiving it as well, and they are taking advantage of the same education.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. Mr. Jeffries, you are recognized.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the witnesses for their presence here today.

Dr. Huerta, how does the percentage of private school students who are English language learners compare to the percentage of public school students?

Mr. HUERTA. This is a number that varies again state by state, but we know that private schools accept substantially fewer students with English language needs, as well as students with special education needs. On the latter, private schools are not required to provide special education to their students. That is very important to consider.

Even though there are some special ed vouchers that exist in several states, voucher schools that accept these students are not in any way compelled or held accountable to actually provide the same special ed quality services that would have otherwise been provided in a public school.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Thank you. On that point, Representative Bryan, private schools participating in North Carolina's school voucher/school choice program under law are able to exclude students with disabilities and special needs; correct?

Mr. BRYAN. That is correct.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Under North Carolina law, private schools that are receiving taxpayer dollars are able to exclude students with limited English proficiency; is that correct?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Under North Carolina law, private schools that are receiving taxpayer dollars are able to exclude students with certain religious backgrounds; is that correct?

Mr. BRYAN. There is no—yes, they have their own standard requirements. Of course, they do not get money for any of those things either.

Mr. JEFFRIES. But they are able to exclude, even if they are receiving taxpayer dollars related to other students participating in the voucher program, they can make the exclusionary decisions based on religion; correct?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes. They are an existing private school, so they have their own admission standards.

Mr. JEFFRIES. I am not even quite sure that is constitutional, but that is a question for another day. Public schools are required to educate all students, correct, regardless of religious background, regardless of special needs, regardless of their English language learner status; correct?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes, and they get a lot of extra money to do so.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Can you explain to me why it is fair for the taxpayers of North Carolina to essentially fund private school vouchers for schools that can engage in these discriminatory practices that you just acknowledged exist under law?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, fundamentally, it is the parents exercising the right, which we have been doing since we have been America. We give out college grants to folks, they can exercise those at private religious universities, you can go to a Jewish college, a Christian college, whatever kind of college you want to go to and get public dollars for that. It is a parent or in that case a student making a choice.

Mr. JEFFRIES. You do not have a problem with taxpayer dollars being used in this fashion where private schools are able to essen-

tially say "no, you are an English language learner, we are not going to accept you, even if you received a voucher. No, you are a special needs student with disabilities, we are not going to accept you". You do not have an issue with that?

Mr. BRYAN. Again, they do not get money for those things. We give extra money for most of those things, and the standard traditional school gets that money. In these cases, they do not. There are schools that do take special need kids. That is the marketplace of the private schools.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Given the exclusionary nature, as you have acknowledged, under North Carolina law, some of these students who are ELL individuals or special needs students actually do not have choice; correct?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, it depends. I think there are schools that do provide that. I would love for more kids to have choices.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Right. Mr. Robinson, is the objective of many of these programs that you have supported to provide low income students with the broadest range of options? Is that right?

Mr. ROBINSON. Correct.

Mr. JEFFRIES. Okay. Now, the majority of programs throughout the country that participate in private school sort of voucher initiatives, the majority of states, I should say, they do not cover the full cost of tuition; correct?

Mr. ROBINSON. Milwaukee does not cover full cost of tuition. It is a social justice model where the school accepts $7,200, and it varies a little more for high school. When they accept the money, they cannot charge tuition beyond that. If they attend a school that is $20,000, they accept the $7,200, the rest is gone. Social justice—

Mr. JEFFRIES. That is in Milwaukee. The majority of private school voucher programs throughout the country do not cover the full cost of tuition; correct?

Mr. ROBINSON. No, and it depends on where you are. Let's look at Georgia where they have a special needs scholarship. It can go as high as $19,000, depending upon what needs you have. The laws are specific and change throughout the state. North Carolina is one example, but there are others. It is a myth that all—there are kids in voucher programs and others that are ELL students. In Washington, D.C., the opportunities scholarship program, I went to an event where you had parents, many of them or their children, English is their second language, there are other programs in this city, so I would recommend law—

Mr. JEFFRIES. My time has expired, but in Washington, D.C., there are 53 programs participating in the school voucher initiative, and the majority of students only attend eight. That is not really school choice. I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman's time has expired. I would now like to recognize another champion of school choice, another Indianan, a Hoosier, I guess they are, Mr. Rokita. You are recognized.

Mr. ROKITA. I thank the chairman for the hearing. I thank the witnesses for their time. I want to first go to Mr. Robinson just to see if he wants to continue with his answer that Mr. Jeffries questioned him about, if you have any more to add to that. Time ran out.

Mr. ROBINSON. Oh, sure. It is quality versus quantity. Sidwell Friends and other high performing schools are part of the program. Those are options that would not be in place. Same thing in Milwaukee, same thing in New Orleans and other states.

The gentleman left from Milwaukee, one point I wanted to mention, it is true there was actually someone who used public dollars to buy a Cadillac, there are surely private school providers who use the money for different things, the Teachers Union made sure they highlighted the private school provider buying the Cadillac, but I would like to see the Teachers Union also highlight the thousands of children through a quality education who graduated from high school and college who are able to actually buy their own Cadillacs because of the education they received in a voucher program.

Mr. ROKITA. Excellent point, Mr. Robinson. That goes to one of my other questions. In fact, we are concerned about accountability as Mrs. Fudge stated, and that is true, but as to these public school choice programs—private school choice programs, like in Milwaukee, is it not true there is scrutiny there. There are reports made. When you look at those, that scrutiny, relative to what the traditional public school scrutiny is, is it not accurate that these programs do get more scrutiny?

Mr. ROBINSON. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, actually, I will use the term broadly, regulates and oversees the program. If you think there is no accountability, talk to the private schools that were closed because of financial malfeasance and other problems.

If you look at Florida, Florida's program, the tax credit program, those students who take public money in fact are required to take a test, either the state test or NAEP test, and that information is made available to the Department of Education, and we give an update to the legislature.

In Virginia, we have a tax credit program, relatively new. In November of last year, a report was submitted to the legislature on the number of students who were participating.

Departments of Education for the most part for tax credits could be a Department of Revenue or Taxation, are in fact overseeing the programs, and trust me, they have actually closed programs, and there is accountability there.

Mr. ROKITA. I have one more line of questioning for you. Your testimony focused a lot on research. Dr. Huerta's testimony focused on that, too. As the Ranking Member stated, the data somehow is saying that on average, public school choice is just average. Do you want to comment on that?

Mr. ROBINSON. Well, CREDO said it was more than average, and that was 42 urban areas and 22 cities. We looked at the gold standard 13 studies. They are actually showing, for example, you have Cohen 2008, eight points in reading, seven points in math. Green 2001 in Charlotte, six points combined in reading and math. Green 1998 Milwaukee, six points in reading, 11 points in math.

Some studies showed, particularly with African American students, five percentage points for math, and particularly those coming from low performing schools.

At the end of the day, we can debate statistics all night. When you talk to parents, what they want to know is a school good, is

it safe, and will my child have an opportunity to advance in ways I could not. That is how they make their decision.

We as thinkers and social scientists, we can debate the nuances, but for parents who have to make real world decisions, they are making decisions and voting with their feet. I think we should listen to that. The research matters, and it seems to—

Mr. ROKITA. Excellent. Ms. Merriweather, do you agree with what has been said by Mr. Robinson?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. I do, and I just would like to add that when the discussion that we are having here today seems to not be the discussion of whether we should have school choice or whether we should not, it just seems accountability, and I totally agree there should be checks and balances with private schools, charter schools, virtual schools, all forms of school choice.

I am thankful to hear that the discussion is not whether this program is not effective and not needed, rather, it is where do we come in and make sure everyone is accountable.

Mr. ROKITA. Thank you. In the time I have remaining, sticking with you, Ms. Merriweather, what do you think about the allegation, the comment, the opinion that these programs simply take money from low performing schools, from poor neighborhoods, and move it to more effluent neighborhoods?

Is that valid?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. I do not know the rules and regulations of it. I just know when I was in school and when my siblings, my biological siblings, were in the public schools, the schools that we went to were low performing, and we did not have all the resources that we needed, and the teachers dreaded coming to school, and if we acted out, which most of us did, we were given punishment that was not good.

When I went to a private school, when I started trying to act out and do those types of things, I was chastised in different ways. I was given alternative ways to cope with the things that I was feeling at home, the social issues that I was actually dealing with.

Mr. ROKITA. Thank you, Ms. Merriweather. Mr. Chairman, it seems that what Ms. Merriweather is saying is we need universal school choice for every student.

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman yields back. Ms. Clark?

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of the panelists who are with us today. I could not agree more than with the gentleman from Indiana when he said that this is the civil rights issue of our time, access to quality education for every single student, no matter what their income, no matter what their zip code is.

Ms. Merriweather, you have an inspiring story that fits right into that narrative of how do we provide that for every single child in this country. It seems like sometimes we get focused on choice is a way to get us to that goal, but choice is not the goal itself.

Representative Bryan, I was looking at some numbers from North Carolina, and these are rough numbers, but there approximately 120,000 students served in private schools, about 60,000 more in charter schools in North Carolina, and you have approximately 1.5 million school age students, children in North Carolina.

How when you were looking at designing your choice programs—did you look at how we build a system? Obviously, you do not have the capacity or anywhere close to serve the majority of children, so how did you look at designing a system that would actually help every child get that opportunity?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, I think that is a good question and actually a broader question. I think we looked at a lot of the Florida tax credit program, which had been running for 10 years, and was running successfully with public and private schools really partnering in some ways. Superintendents that had been opposed to programs like this now feeling like they were able to partner with many of these private schools.

We looked at it and focusing really on the most underperforming and the highest poverty kids. We were focused on a particular issue and an immediate need, which again is if you are a parent and your kid is in a school that is not serving them well, you want an immediate option to get them in a school that—

Ms. CLARK. Was that your focus, immediate need? Were you looking at all at how to build a system and create opportunities through the system?

Mr. BRYAN. I think it is both. I think we are also doing things on the larger scale public school side from making sure we are focusing on our bottom performing schools.

Ms. CLARK. Do students who apply for a voucher or go into your charter school system need to come from underperforming public schools?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes, generally.

Ms. CLARK. That is a requirement for getting a voucher?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes. You can go in as a kindergartner without—the main students are transferring from the public schools.

Ms. CLARK. Okay, and how does that fit in with private schools, as you described, having the freedom not to share information or accountability? How do you build a better system when you do not have that information on how students are faring?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, the parents know how their students are faring, and I think they are the ultimate form of accountability, is a parent feeling like their kid is being successful in that school. We know—

Ms. CLARK. How does that feedback from an individual family and parent get back to the public school system where the overwhelming majority of students are?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, I mean, the easiest thing is if a parent does not like their school, they will not exercise on the option again. They will go back to the public school if they do not feel like the school is serving them well.

Ms. CLARK. It is really a program based on the individual family, not the school system, not building up all North Carolina schools?

Mr. BRYAN. Well, I mean like any small program, I think there is an acknowledgment that the vast bulk of our students, just like what has happened in Florida, Florida has had this program for 10 years, and the vast bulk of students remain in traditional public schools. They have also expanded and grown a lot and it has come to serve those families very well, understanding their unique

needs, they are hard to meet, and sometimes moving to a private school environment is a great fit for them.

Ms. CLARK. Dr. Huerta, have you seen any state or school system that has used the school choice program, whether it is charter, private, voucher, to effectively increase opportunity and quality of the public school system overall? Have you seen any examples of that?

Mr. HUERTA. I think we see across states many examples that choice has actually increased choices for families, but as I indicated, the evidence is quite mixed with regard to the issues of quality.

If you are asking me whether choice has increased quality overall—

Ms. CLARK. That is what I am asking.

Mr. HUERTA. The facts are clear it does not. We see some level evidence that students are performing about the same and then we see some very compelling evidence that shows kids in some of the privatization mechanisms are actually not faring as well.

As a mechanism for improvement compared to what we see where the majority of kids are, it is a system that has actually not shown sufficient evidence.

Ms. CLARK. Thank you very much.

Chairman KLINE. The gentlelady's time has expired. Mr. Carter?

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank all of you for being here. Ms. Merriweather, you are a beam of sunshine in our day today. Thank you for being here and thank you for your story. You know it is a honor for us to serve as representatives of the people, but like anything else, sometimes it can be a grind, and sometimes we wonder if we are making a difference, but it is stories like yours that keep us going. Thank you.

I want to ask you, do you know of any other stories similar to yours? Have there been other people, friends of yours, that you have known? You put it so well. I have always said poverty breeds poverty, and we have to break that cycle, and you said that, that cycle has been broken. Do you know of any other examples?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Most definitely. I love to tell people, everyone in my class, all six of us, we all went off to college, and we all are now in grad school or are working, and we are making a different life for ourselves and many of our parents, you know, had to grow up unfortunately in, and that is the story of many of the other kids that went to my school. They have made a difference and they are excelling in school currently and have graduated from high school.

Mr. CARTER. Well, thank you again. Mr. Bryan, I had the honor of serving in the Georgia state legislature for 10 years. I was a cosponsor of both the voucher bill and the special needs scholarship bill, and we passed both of those bills, and that we have in effect now, and that I understand you have in effect in North Carolina as well.

Can you tell me about the success of that program? Has it been successful, and what do you attribute it to?

Mr. BRYAN. Again, I would say our programs are new, so anything I say is mostly anecdotal. Again, I had the opportunity as I mentioned in my opening remarks to go visit a school that is right in uptown Charlotte and see 23 of the kids exercising on it, exer-

cising on the opportunity scholarship, and just to hear stories about how excited their families are. The school is performing wonderfully. I do not know the express scores for each of those kids, but I know they are doing well, and it is an academically rigorous environment.

Again, I think it is testimonials like the ones you have heard today that make you realize that parents and students are excited and happy with their choices. I think that tells you there is success happening.

Mr. CARTER. You see more parental involvement, you see more excitement, if you will?

Mr. BRYAN. Yes, definitely. We now have rallies with parents coming, people who want to get the scholarship, people emailing us constantly saying how can I get a scholarship, I would really like to get one.

Mr. CARTER. Great. Mr. Robinson, in some of your recently published work, you say an estimated 18,500 families, children, educators, and charter school employees gathered in Brooklyn, Brooklyn, New York, I assume, to rally in support of charter schools, after the Mayor attempted to stop the growth of charter schools; is that correct?

Mr. ROBINSON. Correct.

Mr. CARTER. That to me seems to be a clear sign that there is a lot of positive growth and the support behind the charter schools and behind their expansion is there. What I want to ask you is this, when you see that, what about the remaining, the schools that remain? What do you see happen?

I am a big free market guy. I believe in competition. What I am trying to ask is what do you see happen to those other schools?

Mr. ROBINSON. So, if you look at Milwaukee, the three previous superintendents, actually, it is four, said while they had challenges and concerns about the program, they actually saw the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program encouraging them to do better, so as to actually keep more students in public schools. That is a fact.

You mentioned Georgia. I am on the board of the GOAL Scholarship Program. We are the largest one in Georgia. We have 13,212 students who we have invested money in, the majority of them low income and working class families, making a tremendous difference.

There are now superintendents and school boards that are saying guess what, what are they offering at the private school that we can do differently, so that is a change.

I would also like to say that when I worked for D.C. Public Schools here in the 90s, traditional public schools do not educate all students, even though they have a constitutional obligation to do so, meaning there were some students with special needs that were so severe they actually had to partner and contract with private companies, non-profit companies, and for profit companies. Guess what? Their charter schools would actually partner with traditional public schools for services as well as those in the non-profit and for profit market.

We often have to go outside of our own realm to get support, but places like New York and others are showing there is a demand for it, and we should support it.

Mr. CARTER. Right, so competition works. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. Ms. Bonamici?

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It has been an interesting discussion this morning. I want to start by following up on an earlier comment. Representative Bryan mentioned Pell Grants as if they were analogous to vouchers, but we have not as a country made access to higher education a universal right like we have with K–12 education. If we do, then it will be a sound analogy, but without that, we are talking apples and oranges.

It has been just a couple of months since our committee helped pass the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was a historic achievement, upholding the civil rights legacy of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

That legacy was really part of a sustained commitment to deliver support to underserved public schools so every student in every community has access to a high-quality education.

Ms. Merriweather, your story is very inspiring. In fact, it inspires me to work even harder to make sure that every student in every school has caring teachers and small classes and high expectations.

I am concerned that today we are discussing the possibility of diverting taxpayer dollars from public schools to give students resources to attend private schools, which frequently are not held accountable to serving all students.

It is also unfortunate that school privatization efforts also tend to be based on the premise that our public schools are failing. That term keeps coming up, "failing schools." Of course, we could do more to strengthen public education for all students, and there are students who struggle more than others in our schools.

We made significant progress with the Every Student Succeeds Act, but let's look at what our schools are doing well, especially when we consider resource challenges and the expectations that we rightly put on our public schools to serve every student, regardless of socioeconomic background, ability, or special needs. Today, dropout rates are declining, more students are being challenged in advanced courses, and achievement gaps are narrowing.

We as policy makers have a responsibility to ensure an excellent education for all students in our country, and we should continue to work on policies that are consistent with that commitment.

In my district, Beaverton, Oregon is a school district that has several public school options in addition to comprehensive high schools. For example, there is an international school and a science and technology school, arts, and a health careers option, without diverting dollars to private schools. I firmly believe in that kind of choice within the public school system.

Dr. Huerta, I want to follow up on the consequences of school privatization efforts for students with disabilities. There was just an article in the Oregonian Newspaper in my state about Joey. Joey was attending a Catholic school in Portland, and he has Down Syndrome. He had some behavioral issues at school like many students do. His parents are dedicated to their parish, and they were actually paying about $2,000 a month for extra classroom assistance, but the school where Joey's three siblings attended and where his friends are, asked Joey to leave.

Your testimony mentions cost differentials and recognizes that delivering high-quality services to students with disabilities requires an investment of resources. So can you discuss how voucher programs relate to students like Joey and his circumstances? Do they generally offer sufficient resources to permit students like Joey to attend parochial and other private schools?

Mr. HUERTA. Thank you for your question. There are some private schools nationwide that do provide some special ed services. Private schools in general are not required by the states to provide the same level and quality of special ed services that public schools are, including not having to hire certified teachers that have been certified in special education. I think that is very important to remember.

In states like Florida where there has been a long-standing special ed voucher, when a parent chooses to use that special ed voucher and go to a private school, they are also surrendering the right that is provided to them by the federal funding for special education.

Ms. BONAMICI. I do not want to interrupt, but I really want to get this other question that is so important. I represent a number of towns that are small, and they are rural, and their schools are the community hubs and sometimes the place where several generations of families have attended, so school privatization does not resonate in these towns because the closest alternative school might be typically another public school in another small town far away.

How do statewide voucher programs affect financial stability in rural public education?

Mr. HUERTA. I think it would have the same effect as it would in urban places. There are states that allow some public monies to flow to private schools where there are not enough public schools available, including resources for books and transportation and a variety of other things.

The effect on the economies of scale in public schools when public money is diverted to private schools is similar. There might be a larger impact actually in some of these rural areas because the fact is the public schools still have to serve the remaining kids even when they lose a small proportion of them, and that might have a very strong and negative impact on the finances of public schools.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you. My time has expired. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentlelady. Dr. Heck?

Mr. HECK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Merriweather, like my colleagues, I also want to applaud you for appearing here today and sharing your very inspirational story. I can tell you for the five years I have been on this committee, that is the most moving testimony I have heard, so thank you for being here.

My state, Nevada, just passed education savings account legislation last year in 2015, and it was just rolled out just this last month in January. In that legislation, 96 percent of the students statewide would be eligible, special needs and families with incomes up to 100 percent of the free and reduced lunch program standard would be able to receive 100 percent of the basic support for pupils, others would be eligible to get 90 percent of that basic

support, tuition, home schooling, tutoring, educational materials and so on.

In a recent poll, 61 percent of those parents in Nevada said they support that program, 21 percent were opposed. Of the 61 percent that were pro, 60 percent were union households, 71 percent were Hispanic households.

The program has been called the first universal ESSA program nationwide by the Friedman Foundation, and in supporting the program, our Governor, Brian Sandoval, stated he believes fixing Nevada's perpetually underperforming education system must include more resources for public schools, and he and our legislature actually increased public school funding in the last session, and quote "As well as robust options for school choice." End quote.

Even with that overwhelming support, as we expected, a court case has been filed challenging the new program.

Mr. Robinson, in your written testimony, you offer several suggestions for congressional action, and you mentioned the possibility of a Government Accountability Office study about how federal funding rules prevent states, and you specifically mentioned Nevada, from using federal education funding to support the SEAs.

Do you have an opinion on how those federal rules could hamper those efforts?

Mr. ROBINSON. I used Nevada because you are in fact universal, so it was a little different than the other states. If you are looking at actually using Title I and IDEA money, it is often tough to do because at the federal level, you will set rules, they have to (a) go through a Department of Education, and (b) go to the local system. There may be ways of actually streamlining that to get that either directly to the local district or the superintendent of the school board can actually make a decision, or to streamline the process to go directly to families particularly if they are the ones using their debit card to make purchases for the kind of services you mentioned.

Mr. HECK. I appreciate that. As you mentioned again, being the first universal ESSA program, could you explain what makes Nevada's program universal versus some of the other ESSA programs that are out there around the country?

Mr. ROBINSON. So, some of the other ESSA programs are focused on special populations, either special needs, at times, military, yours is open to any student who is within—96 percent of your students who are in the public school system for at least a number of days.

Yours is different in the fact that you can receive one, I can receive one, someone can as well, even though he or she may not be special needs or otherwise.

Mr. HECK. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. Mr. Polis, you are recognized.

Mr. POLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the committee highlighting School Choice Week, and of course, we are doing it a week late, but you know, it is never too late to celebrate school choice, and we should celebrate school choice all 52 weeks of the year. I want to thank our witnesses for coming before us today.

My home State of Colorado has a number of mechanisms to allow parents to choose schools. We have open enrollment within districts. We have open enrollment between districts. We not only allow districts to charter schools, we have a state chartering network.

The history of incorporating privately run schools into the school choice network has been legally troubled in Colorado. The first attempt in recent history was in 2003 through an opportunity contract program, which effectively required some of the low performing districts to reach out to private providers within their jurisdiction and create contracts to provide for education.

This was struck down by our State Supreme Court on local control grounds. We have local control incorporated into our governing document and in our constitution.

The more recent attempt was at the local level where one of our large suburban school districts, Douglas County, elected a school board that chose to pursue a voucher-like program, and again, while they implemented that for a year, it was struck down by the Supreme Court on very different grounds, namely using state money to fund religious schools. We are one of the states with language in our state's constitution that prohibits that or not.

The status of the voucher program with regard to secular schools remains in question. There were six secular schools in the initial roll out from Douglas County.

My question for Mr. Robinson is given that legal framework we have had in Colorado, the most effective way that we have seen on the ground to incorporate private providers into the public education network has been through contract education.

I see that is not one of the areas you have highlighted. You have highlighted tax credits and vouchers. I wonder if you have any thoughts on contract education, namely making school districts that choose to contract with private providers, and I will give you an example, we have had for well over a decade Denver Public Schools, one of the largest school districts in our state, fluctuates between first and second, contracted with a private provider called Escuela Tlalelolco, a predominately Latino school, and effectively compensated them for the students that were enrolled there.

What are your thoughts on contract education and is that something you might be able to incorporate into your global look at school choice?

Mr. ROBINSON. When we mention school choice, we primarily have focused on it from 1990 forward, but if we actually go back as early as the 1970s, we had school choice in the context of magnet schools and open enrollment, as you mentioned.

Many school systems today actually already contract with providers, non-profit, and for profit, simply to provide services that it cannot.

I think at times we overuse the term "privatization" as if somehow for profit companies are not involved in education except for vouchers, when in fact the desks students sit in, the computers they use, the pencils they use, at times, uniforms, all of that often, most of that is driven by for profit companies, so we already have a contracting system in place, and I think it makes sense where it should be used.

Mr. POLIS. And both school districts, I would point out as well, as well as charter schools in Colorado provide contract education opportunities, whether that is online or physical.

My next question is for Mr. Bryan. It came up in the discussion when you were asked some questions about your bill from Ms. Fudge and others. The students that are publicly funded do take the state assessments, is that correct, under your bill?

Mr. BRYAN. That is correct.

Mr. POLIS. I want to be clear because there was some discussion about that, that somehow there was freedom or escaping accountability. The students that are not publicly funded, that is up to the school whether they take the—

Mr. BRYAN. Let me be clear in my statement. They have to take a nationally normed test. That is the requirement.

Mr. POLIS. Is that the same test that other public school students take in your state?

Mr. BRYAN. Not necessarily.

Mr. POLIS. Well, you know, again, there sounds like there is an accountability problem there. I think where taxpayer funds go, there needs to be accountability, and in all the incidences of school choice in our state and certainly the voucher programs that I am aware of, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C., among others, all of those students would take the same test as other public school students.

Of course, schools that fail to achieve progress would presumably face the same consequences as other public schools, which could potentially be loss of funding. It depends under state laws. Regardless of whether a school is a public school, a charter school, or an independent school that somehow participates in public education, what we as policymakers should care about is quality.

Last question—we are out of time. I was going to ask about IDEA, and mention that many school districts who are already responsible, of course, for meeting the educational needs of each student already contract with many private providers for special education services to ensure that those students' learning needs are met.

I thank the chair for the hearing and the time, and I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. Mr. Messer?

Mr. MESSER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the debate we have had today. I think it has been very enlightening.

Every time I am back in my district, I try to go to a local public school. I try to visit charter and alternative schools all around the country. I have had the opportunity to go to the BASIS School here in Washington, D.C., which is an amazing school where at the junior high level or middle school level, kids are taking Latin, chemistry, biology, physics, and in 7th grade they are doing a second language.

Contrary to some of the testimony by some folks across on your side of the dais today, they are taking kids from every zip code in the District of Columbia in that school.

Ms. Merriweather, I was going to turn to you because when I have had a chance to meet with these amazing kids, they asked a series of very tough questions of the congressman who was there,

but their first question was this: why cannot every kid in Washington, D.C. have the same opportunity I have here at BASIS.

Maybe I will just ask you to talk a little bit. You have given amazing testimony about the opportunity that came to you. What are your thoughts about whether everybody ought to have those same kind of chances?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Thank you so much. It is heartfelt. I met a little boy, and currently in Florida, the program is being sued, and he was looking at me crying, and he said am I going to be kicked out of my school. It was so heartbreaking because I actually felt it and I asked myself, you know, what if I was not given this opportunity to be able to attend this private school, and would I be the same person I am today, and my answer to myself was no.

It is heartbreaking that every kid does not have the opportunity to attend a school of their parents' choice because so many times low income kids are trapped into a district where their schools are underperforming.

I would like to add that the elementary school that I went to, one of them, it was—I hate to say this—it was terrible. Today, it is not, you know. They turned around and it is a magnet school.

It is great that there are systems of changing and evolving schools, and that is the whole point of this.

Mr. MESSER. Yes. Thank you very much. Mr. Robinson, I think it is important as we talk about framing school choice and what the appropriate federal role might be to recognize that over 80 percent of the education dollars spent in our country are not federal dollars. It is somewhere south of 20 percent that is being funded by the Federal Government, and probably the biggest pool of that is Title I dollars, and I think that is roughly $15 billion, right?

Could you comment just a little, one, about how effectively we are using Title I dollars today, and maybe expand upon, you made the suggestion that we could look at using those dollars, with what I would consider the ultimate local control, allowing it to be portable and for parents to decide how that money would be spent.

Mr. ROBINSON. I have had a chance to see Title I in action in both Virginia and Florida. Let me say many families would find themselves in a tough situation in the absence of a Title I program. I think what one of your former colleagues many years ago did, Augustus Hawkins, who was a Congress member of my area in Los Angeles many years ago, who helped push the idea that there are simply some families and communities where there needs to be an investment.

I am glad that is in place. It is a good social safety net. I have seen some great results from kids who have gone to Title I schools, who with the right investment of teachers, other human resources, and frankly technology, have seen some gains.

Unfortunately, I have also seen some challenges, wasteful investments. Often times, we mention private schools not having all the appropriate paperwork. We have some of those challenges in our public school sector as well.

The idea about empowering parents to use Title I if we use the idea of a debit card is not per se to divert money away as much as to give those parents they have already invested in the system.

It is taxpayer money. It is a state issue. This is one way of actually empowering parents to do something differently.

You frankly will even find some superintendents of school boards who may want to experiment with this idea to say let's try to see how it works. Through small evaluative processes, we can actually found ways for both public and private institutions to learn from each other.

Mr. MESSER. Thank you, appreciate your testimony.

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman yields back. Mr. Hinojosa?

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you, Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott for today's hearing, giving us an opportunity to focus on the improvement of educational opportunities for all students in every public school.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that my brief opening statement be made part of this hearing.

Chairman KLINE. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

March 2, 2016

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott:

The following document represents an addendum for the official record to my testimony as Minority witness for the full Committee on Education and the Workforce hearing, "Expanding Educational Opportunity Through School Choice," held on February 3, 2016.
Listed below are references to material from my original testimony that the addendum clarifies, along with the written text of the new material:

1. **A written greeting to the Committee Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee**

Good Morning Chairman Kline, ranking member Scott, and members of the House Education and Workforce Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.
My presentation will focus on many of the claims promoted by voucher and tuition tax credit program advocates, followed by a discussion of assumptions linked to the claims and the evidence that provides facts to dispel the claims. I will focus on issues of achievement, as well as the seldom discussed issues linked to the supply side response of school choice reforms, including potential pitfalls that have not been considered by policy makers as voucher and tuition tax credit programs go to scale.

2. **New information providing clarifying details to the fourth claim addressed in my written testimony that includes a mention of *Rouse & Barrow* (2009), as well as recent research on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and Leadership Scholarship Program and relevant citations**

4.) CLAIM: Private schools are more effective then public schools in addressing students' academic needs and improving students' educational outcomes.
In more recent research, Rouse & Barrow (2009) analyzed voucher studies completed prior to

2009 and concluded that "the best research to date finds relatively small achievement gains for students offered education vouchers, most of which are not statistically different from zero" and that secondary effects on remaining public school students (e.g. effects from market competition) cannot be attributed to voucher programs. Findings from an evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) found "no conclusive evidence that the OSP affected student achievement" after five years in operation. And lastly, a statewide study of the Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP) reported negative impacts for participating students, "consistent across income groups, geographic areas, and private school characteristics."
Citation: Abdulkadiroglu, A., Pathak, P. A. & Walters, C. R (2015, December). School Vouchers and Student Achievement: First-Year Evidence from the Louisiana Scholarship Program, NBER Working Paper No. 21839, December 2015 JEL No. I20 Retrieved January 29, 2016 from http://www.nber.org/papers/w21839.pdf , p. 1

Sincerely,

Dr. Luis Huerta
Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy
Teachers College
Columbia University

Mr. HINOJOSA. My first question is going to be directed at State Representative Rob Bryan. Concerns about the effects on academic achievement of the North Carolina private school choice programs have arisen from both the right and the left, so I am curious about data collection regarding student achievement, and what evidence demonstrating the efficacy of North Carolina's private choice programs is available.

Lastly, how is that data used by the state to ensure an equitable education is being provided to students in these programs?

Mr. BRYAN. The programs are too new to really obtain a lot of data, so I could not answer, again, except for anecdotes, but I would say again I think when parents choose a program, they keep their kid if they are satisfied with the results. Again, they do have to take national normed tests, and the parents get all that information. If my kid was not doing well and I move them to another school, I am expected to see them doing better or I am not going to keep them there. I think that is the best evidence.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you. My next question is for Mr. Robinson. Can you tell us what mechanisms are in place for monitoring the private schools in receipt of public dollars through choice programs to protect against discrimination and remedy acts of discrimination if they occur?

Mr. ROBINSON. In Milwaukee, we use that as an example. If you take a look at the legislation that put that law into action, they actually have a line in there where they say the private schools who participate must adhere to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

We also know that over the last three and a half years, I believe, the Federal Government looked into an allegation that there was rapid discrimination against special needs students in the voucher schools in Milwaukee. I believe as of January, they ceased their investigation to find there was in fact no widespread discrimination against special needs students.

Are there some challenges? Absolutely, because we are still dealing with human beings and aspects, but we have put those in place. If you take a look at other state laws, they have also included the 1964 Civil Rights Act to make sure that is in place to deal with discrimination.

You also have inspector generals within the Department of Education either internal requests or outside requests to look into that, so we have some safeguards in there. I would be lying if I tell you there were not slip up's and things that fell through, but we at least put those mechanisms in place to address those issues.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you. My next question is for Dr. Huerta. Dr. Huerta, based on your research, can you tell us more about how voucher and tuition tax credit programs benefit low-income families, and in your response to my question, would you also tell me if Native American Tribal schools are being impacted by this issue we are discussing here today?

Mr. HUERTA. I will answer the second part of your question, Mr. Hinojosa, first, and that is I am not familiar with evidence that has that direct impact on Native American students.

With regard to the first part of your question, we know that vouchers and tuition tax credit programs are serving kids that come from very diverse income brackets. One of the interesting

pieces in the research that I have actually been looking into is the extent to which we begin to identify kids from different thresholds, because often times, we will measure the impact that vouchers might have on kids, for example, for kids that are under the poverty line, but we treat all those kids under that poverty line as one monolithic block, and I think it is important to begin to be able to disentangle that because we see some evidence that some of the low income families that are choosing are the ones that are right below that threshold, and those are families that are very different than the kids who come from families that are much lower than that threshold.

I want to briefly talk about the issue around accountability and specifically the Wisconsin piece that was just brought up. In the case that was mentioned by Mr. Robinson, it is important to remember that one of the reasons that the lawyers from the Federal Government that were actually investigating what was happening in Wisconsin had to make the conclusion they made was because schools in Wisconsin are not responsible or not compelled to actually collect a lot of the data that they were actually trying to analyze, specific to the types of kids they are serving, whether kids with IEPs' needs were being served or not.

The Feds had to actually throw their hands up somewhat because they did not have the data, because the state does not require these private schools to collect or report that data.

Mr. HINOJOSA. That is interesting.

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. HINOJOSA. My time has expired. I thank you all for your participation here today.

Chairman KLINE. Mr. Allen?

Mr. ALLEN. Yes Sir Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panel for being here today and your testimony on this important subject. Obviously, I think the American people have spoken, and they want choice, and they do want accountability. I think each one of you demonstrated that as well.

Ms. Merriweather, I have had an occasion to visit some universities and some schools in the district. Frankly, in talking with the administration at one of the major universities, I was shocked to learn, I said what is your biggest challenge, and they said the emotional health of our students.

Of course, I remember back on my college days. Those were some of the best days of my life, toughest days, but was a great time in my life.

I was more shocked to go into a fairly wealthy area of the district and talk to an elementary school, and I'm sitting there with the administration, and I said what is your biggest challenge, and they said it is the emotional health of our students.

Now, obviously, there was a time in your life where you were in a bad place. I mean you were dealing with things that I think is unfair for a young person to have to deal with, to be honest with you. I am just totally amazed to hear your courageous and heroic story.

What was it that turned you around? What I told these folks at the elementary school is I said we have to address the mind, the

body, and the spirit, the three aspects of the student. What is it that turned your life around?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. I thank you for that because I think you bring up a very valid point because sometimes in a school setting, we forget that a child is a whole person, and that there are things they are dealing with outside of school.

I think that was it for me really, to be at a school where someone was not only interested in my academia, but they were actually interested in my life and bettering my life, and giving me the things that I needed.

I mentioned that they helped me pay for my college applications and testing because I would not have been able to do it by myself or just with my godmother. They assisted me with that also. They cared about the whole person.

I am not saying that public schools do not either, but there are so many students that it is kind of hard to actually invest in each one of them.

Mr. ALLEN. Well, by law, I am not sure our public schools can address that, the whole, by law. Teachers are restrained from doing the very thing that saved your life, because they could be sued.

I will tell you an example of that. We have a school—of course, you know, the facts are this, and we can talk about accountability all we want to, but the reason I am in Congress is because of Heritage School in Augusta, Georgia. That is a Christian school. That school takes in the kids, innocent kids, who are declared losers in the public school system.

Only one of those children has not graduated from high school, and they are pursuing a music career in Nashville, and will probably be able to buy General Motors based on their talent level. That is the only student who has not finished high school and most of those kids are in college, whereas in Richmond County, we have 33,000 kids, we graduate about half of them in the public school system.

Mr. Robinson, those are the facts. Why do we keep debating this?

Mr. ROBINSON. It is about power, and that is what the discussion is about, who is going to control public dollars and for what reason. There are examples from most of the choice states that they are taking hard to serve children. It is simply a fact, but when you play power politics, the goal is to try to take information and use it for a way to prove the obvious.

There are some kids who simply did not do well in a traditional public school. It does not mean the public school is a horrible place. It just was not a good fit for them.

There also was a comment about if a family is at the cusp of 185 percent of poverty versus someone who is lower, that they are different students, different kinds of families. Statistically, yes, but they are unified around one thing, we want options and we want to invest our money the way we see fit.

At the end of the day, this is about power, but if we want to remain powerful as a nation, we have to invest in our children and the schools that work.

Mr. ALLEN. Yes. For disclosure, we elected, my wife and I, to send our children to a Christian school. Mr. Bryan, we do not re-

gret that. In fact, our children have got a good education and they seem to understand a great value system.

Where in the value system—I am out of time here—from the standpoint of what you are doing in North Carolina—

Chairman KLINE. The gentleman's time has expired. Ms. Adams?

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Scott. I want to thank the witnesses for testifying. I had another meeting that overlapped. I did have a chance to read your testimony.

Education has been a long passion of mine, especially as it relates to low income students who are often students of color, and I am one of those, graduated from high school, public high school in Newark, New Jersey, grew up in the ghetto. I taught for 40 years as an educator in Greensboro, North Carolina.

I also served in the North Carolina House for 20.5 years, and I did not get a chance to serve with you, Representative Bryan, but while I was there, I was opposed to efforts to funnel our public dollars to voucher programs, and I am still opposed to that today. I do not think that was a good idea.

However, despite the strong efforts, we were left in North Carolina with an opportunity scholarship program, and I think there are still opportunities that are not there for all of our children. Representative Bryan, I know you are a strong proponent of the program, but I have to let my colleagues who are left here know it is not as good as it sounds.

The program was initially struck down as unconstitutional, rightly asserted that the General Assembly was seeking to push average students from low-income families into non-public schools in order to avoid the cost of providing them a sound basic education in public schools.

I just know a greater percentage, 90 percent of our children, will be educated in public schools. Unfortunately, the State Supreme Court overturned this ruling on ideological lines, and to add insult to injury, Chief Justice Marshall or Martin said that those taxpayers who allege that the program failed, failed to show that they suffered harm.

I really find it hard to believe that taking limited funds that the North Carolina legislature chose to cut from public dollars and sending those to private schools that are not held to the same level of accountability is not harmful, it is harmful.

Dr. Huerta, I have a question for you, if you would expound upon some of the harmful outcomes of voucher programs in other states, and offer some insight on what you think North Carolina can expect for low-income students.

Mr. HUERTA. I will expound on the general context here, and I think it is important to remind everybody that the voucher and tuition tax credit programs actually contest the common school model and erode the ability of the state to be the equalizer when it is needed.

It erodes the ability of the state to actually uphold and advance equity and social cohesion, Democratic goals of schooling, and these are values that have been long held in education. These tenets are actually echoed, and we talked about civil rights today a little bit, these are tenets that are basic tenets that were in Brown v. Board,

when the court stated that education was important, and the court at that point said "Education is important to our Democratic society as required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, and it is the foundation of good citizenship."

My concern from what the research tells us is that as we shift responsibility to educating our students to the private sector where equity is not a value, that we are moving further and further away from the tenets of Brown v. Board.

Ms. ADAMS. In your opinion, do these adverse effects have a greater impact on students of color, and if so, would you tell us why you think that?

Mr. HUERTA. If students of color are denied access because private schools have the ability to choose, then yes, there will be adverse effects.

Ms. ADAMS. Okay. Just one follow up, Dr. Huerta. How much work would have to be done to actually make vouchers work and truly give all students and their families choice?

Mr. HUERTA. A couple of mechanisms that I think can equalize this process. The vouchers have to be a much larger amount. There has to be greater accountability on schools that are accepting vouchers.

One of the new trends that we see in some of the recent legislation is the requirement to actually take either a state assessment or a nationally normed referenced test, but it is important that most of the states who are requiring these tests have no consequences linked to taking a test. Simply requiring a test does not equate to accountability.

There is a mechanism around the access to free and accurate information, which is something that is actually left out of most legislation at the state level, and that is the degree to which parents are provided the information needed to actually make these choices.

There is the issue of access, to compelling private schools to actually guarantee access to all students.

There are mechanisms that can make this process more Democratic. However, the folks who are supporting more privatization want to preserve the right of private schools to not be held accountable by the state.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you very much.

Chairman KLINE. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman KLINE. Ms. Stefanik?

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Merriweather, I want to echo my colleagues' sentiment. Your testimony today was truly inspiring, and the courage and confidence that it takes to testify as a young person before Congress, I commend you for that. I also commend you for your advocacy in ensuring that everyone who is listening to this hearing today understands that achieving a high quality education can truly change your life. Thank you for sharing that empowered story.

I wanted to ask you a question. You talked about small class size, additional teacher help, whether it was with your times tables or your reading comprehension, educating you as a whole person beyond just academic rigor.

Can you give a little bit more detail on what it was like transitioning from your first experience in school to the private school that you attended, and what some of those difference were?

Ms. MERRIWEATHER. Most definitely. So, Esprit de Corps was a church based school, a church that I actually attended. Coming from a public school where I kind of lived the dual lifestyle of acting out, not really listening to my teachers, and then going to church with my godmother, I lived, you know, a dual life.

Going to Esprit de Corps and actually having most of the people that went to the church work at Esprit de Corps, it was very different for me and kind of a culture shock because I was not used to having those two worlds collide.

By me having that experience, I actually was kind of forced innately to behave myself. So, that transition was very different for me personally, but it paid off because the acting in the beginning became a lifestyle, and I actually wanted to learn, and I actually wanted to better myself as an individual.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, and congratulations on being the first member of your family to graduate from high school, undergrad, and you are on your way to getting your graduate degree, and thank you to your godmother for encouraging you to achieve the highest quality education that was available to you.

I wanted to shift gears and build off of my colleague, Ms. Bonamici's, question regarding urban and rural, and the differences within the communities. I represent a rural district in upstate New York. I want to get your ideas, Mr. Robinson, on how we can expand educational choices in rural communities, because the model is different for upstate New York than New York City.

Mr. ROBINSON. So, Wisconsin in 2004 to 2007 was trying to figure out how they could actually expand more charter schools into the rural areas. That is one state I would say to take a look at. Same thing in Georgia.

If you look at the private school sector, I would say take a look at the tax credit scholarship program in Georgia. There are a number of providers, again, I am on GOAL scholarship, which is the largest in the state, but if you take a look at the map of Georgia, surely we have students in the Atlanta metropolitan area, but we serving students in Northern Georgia, Southern Georgia, East and West.

We actually work with school leaders to inform us how best to work with them, working with students in the city and rural areas are different, not for all the reasons we would think, but there are definitely challenges, transportation is one, distance between home and school is another, so transportation challenges.

I think we have learned a lot from listening to them, to figure out how we can do it well. It is not an area where I spend a great deal of time. I know back in Virginia, we have something called the "Horseshoe," and we have a number of families there who have challenges, financially and otherwise, but the community college system, which I would say is one of the best in the nation, they are actually partnering with rural communities, high schools and others, to make sure that adults receive either GEDs, degrees, or actually can go to community school for support.

I would take a look at the Virginia community college system and what they are doing in the Horseshoe with rural families.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you for that. Does technology play a role in how that model may differ? We live in the world of Google hangouts, of a tech based society. I think there are opportunities to modernize how we educate our children using those technological tools.

I wanted to hear if that is part of your thinking in terms of expanding opportunities in rural communities.

Mr. ROBINSON. There were at least nine rural school systems in Virginia who decided not to apply to National Science Foundation as individuals for a grant, they applied together, I believe they received $2 million, and that was to use technology for their students in rural Virginia, mostly of parents without passports, to have conversations with students in other countries, opening the door and getting to the idea of citizenship. That is one example.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentlelady. I think everyone has had a chance to engage in the discussion and debate, so I will move now to any closing remarks that Mr. Hinojosa might have.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the absence of our Ranking Member, I would like to say that it has been very informative to hear each one of our panelists talk to us about the importance of education and how it can change your life, as some of you said.

I want to close by saying that I have not been a teacher, but I have been a policymaker at the local school board, at the Texas State Board of Education, at the community college on the governing board, and here in this committee for the last 20 years.

I have learned that the investment that local, state, and the Federal Government can make in early childhood development, talking two, three, four year olds, getting to learn to read, is probably the best investment we could make, if we are to be able to move them to grade level and have them comprehend what they read, what they hear, that it will be much easier to get them to graduate from high school.

Which was the biggest problem that I faced during the early years of serving as a policymaker where we had only 60 to 65 percent of kindergartners graduating from high school in deep South Texas, from San Antonio down to Brownsville, that whole area.

We now have many of those school districts that are graduating at 85 percent, and the difference has been early childhood reading and writing that has made them successful and having gone on to college.

Thank you for your contributions, and we look forward to trying to put to use your recommendations. Thank you.

Chairman KLINE. I thank the gentleman. I want to thank the witnesses. Ms. Merriweather, again, you have been an inspiration to all of us, and we wish you the very best as you go forward, and like Ms. Stefanik, I think we need to thank your godmother. There are a lot of people these days who do not have a godmother, so I am grateful to God and to your godmother.

We talked quite a bit today about accountability in choice. Dr. Huerta had some data that he was using. Mr. Bryan, I thought you

made a very, very good point that there is always going to be accountability when you have a requirement for a nationally normed test, if those kids are not doing well, the parents are going to remove those kids.

I think it is a valid question about accountable to whom, and what we are talking about here is families where their children are in truly failing schools. Let me hasten to say that I know most, by far most, of our public schools, traditional public schools are doing very well.

In some states—the Hoosiers are still here in strength, I see, and thank you very much for that, I am sure they are very proud of many of their traditional public schools in Indiana, as we are in Minnesota, the home of public charter schools, by the way, the originators of public charter schools.

In some cities in Indiana, as in some cities in Minnesota, Minneapolis being one, we are horribly failing our children. When you are graduating less than half of your children, you have a real problem.

We worked very hard. I am very pleased with the work that we did in ESSA, and I thank you, Mr. Robinson, for your kinds words about that, as we are looking for ways to return control to parents and to local school boards and to teachers, and all of us know the single most important thing—I am not disagreeing with my friend and colleague about the importance of early education—the single most important thing is a really good teacher.

If you have a really good teacher, you will probably going to succeed in the classroom. If you do not, it does not matter whether it is a private school or public charter school or traditional public school. If you have poor teachers, then you are going to have poor results.

All those things warrant our attention and work, and I appreciate the expertise of all the witnesses here today. Your testimony and your engagement in our questions was very, very helpful.

There being no further business, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

○