

THE DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA, CENSUS AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

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THE DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2011

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA, CENSUS, AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:33 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Trey Gowdy (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Gowdy, Gosar, Burton, McHenry, Walsh, Davis, Norton, Clay, and Murphy.

Staff present: Robert Borden, general counsel; Molly Boyd, parliamentarian; Drew Colliatie, staff assistant; John Cuaderes, deputy staff director; Howard A. Denis, senior counsel; Adam P. Fromm, director of Member liaison and floor operations; Linda Good, chief clerk; James Robertson, professional staff member; Laura L. Rush, deputy chief clerk; Peter Warren, policy director; Jeff Wease, deputy CIO; Ronald Allen, minority staff assistant; Carla Hultberg, minority chief clerk; Lucinda Lessley, minority policy director; William Miles, minority professional staff member; Suzanne Sachsman Grooms, minority chief counsel; Donald Sherman, minority counsel; and Mark Stephenson, minority senior policy advisor/legislative director.

Mr. GOWDY. Welcome to our committee. This is a hearing on the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Keeping the Door Open.

The committee will come to order and I will read the mission statement of the Oversight Committee, which reads as follows: We exist to secure two fundamental principles: first, Americans have a right to know that money Washington takes from them is well spent and, second, Americans deserve an efficient, effective government that works for them. Our duty on the Oversight and Reform Committee is to protect these rights. Our solemn responsibility is to hold government accountable to taxpayers because taxpayers have a right to know what they get from their government. We will work tirelessly in partnership with citizen watchdogs to deliver the facts to the American people and bring genuine reform to the Federal bureaucracy. This is the mission of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

Just so our panelists and audience can know, we will have a couple of opening statements, and then we will swear the witnesses and go into the testimony. And on behalf of all of us, thank you for being here.

Consensus is not always easy to find in the world in which we live, but I am confident that all of us in this room, regardless of political persuasion, agree on the value of education. I can testify from firsthand experience about the magic and power of education and its ability to transform not just a single life, as important as that is, but also to transform generations of lives.

My parents grew up in a small farming town in South Carolina. My mother's grandfather was a sharecropper. My mother's father had a sixth grade education. My father is the first male to attend college in his family, and he did so by getting up at 4 a.m., and rolling newspapers and delivering them because he dreamed of going to college. And he saved all of his money and he went and took all the math and science classes he could take at the University of South Carolina and then, when the money ran out, he went to medical school. So when I tell folks back home that my father is a medical doctor, but he is not a college graduate, they don't believe me, but it is true.

My father realized that education was his only ticket to a better life, and because of his sacrifices he changed not only his own life, but the life of my three sisters and me, and generations to come. And I have been continually reminded of the power of education in my professional life as a prosecutor. Along with my friends in law enforcement, I have seen almost every form of crime imaginable. The one constant in those 16 years of being a prosecutor is the inextricable link between education, or a lack thereof, and crime.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with your chief of police in the District of Columbia for the second time, but it was a more extended meeting; a wonderful person. I am very impressed with the department. And what they were doing was coming up with a crime reduction strategy for the District of Columbia, and I could not help but think, during that meeting, that the best crime reduction strategy of all is a high school diploma.

So we are here to evaluate the District of Columbia's Opportunity Scholarship Program and, in my judgment, the evidence proves beyond a reasonable doubt the value and the efficacy of this program. The parents overwhelmingly approve of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. They are engaged, they are involved, and they feel vested. Students approve of the program, as evidenced by the fact that demand outpaces supply four to one. Parents value the discipline and learning environment afforded by the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Student performance is up both generally, as evidenced by the higher graduation rates, and more particularly as evidenced by their reading scores.

Parents value the choices afforded by this program. They don't want to be told their choices are limited because their bank accounts are limited. What is good enough for the highest ranking officials in our country should be good enough for everyone. Even the U.S. Department of Education once lauded the Opportunity Scholarship Program as an example of a program that is working, before someone or something told them to think otherwise.

The residents of the District of Columbia overwhelmingly want choices with respect to the education of their children. The Opportunity Scholarship Program may not be the answer for every student, and this bill acknowledges that by providing ample funding

to the public school system, the charter school system, as well as the Opportunity Scholarship Program. But the Opportunity Scholarship Program has been successful in the eyes of the participants, and it is frankly beyond comprehension how there could be opposition to a program that parents like, students want, that produces results, and does nothing to detract from other educational resources.

The most compelling piece of evidence in support of this program is the personal testimony of the students and the parents. I have listened as students and parents alike have vouched for this program as a lifesaver and a dream maker. It is one thing to remind parents and children that their income levels are low. I will not be the one to tell them that their dreams are too high.

With that, I would yield to the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me, first of all, congratulate you on your selection as the chairman of this important subcommittee and I look forward to working and building a very positive relationship with you as we carry out the subcommittee's work. And while I intend to keep my remarks somewhat brief this morning so that I can share some of the time with Congresswoman Norton, I appreciate the chairman's inaugural hearing on a topic that I care so deeply about and have spent such a great deal of my life focused on, and that is the issue of public education.

I would also like to ask unanimous consent that the statements of the National School Boards Association, the National Coalition for Public Education, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Association of School Administrators, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the American Association of University Women in Opposition to H.R. 471 be included in the record.

Mr. GOWDY. Without objection, they will be made part of the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

February 28, 2011

Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Oppose renewing and expanding the D.C. Voucher Program H.R. 471

Dear Member:

The National School Boards Association (NSBA), representing 95,000 local school board members across the nation through our state school boards associations, urges you to oppose any efforts, including H.R. 471, the *Scholarships for Opportunity Results (SOAR) Act*, to renew the only federally-funded voucher program – the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program in the 112th Congress. The bill is a subject of a subcommittee hearing on March 1.

NSBA opposes the continuation of the pilot voucher program, which based on federally-mandated studies, has repeatedly failed to show effectiveness in improving student achievement over the last seven years. This \$13.2 million annual program has provided vouchers of up to \$7,500 each for some 1,700 students. While the program technically expired in 2008, it was funded for an additional year (2009-2010) in the FY 2009, FY 2010 appropriations bills and the FY 2011 continuing resolution. The current operable language allows participating students to continue in the program and stipulates that no new students will be added to the program. However, early in the first session of the 112th Congress in January, the SOAR bills were introduced in the House and Senate, H.R. 471 and S. 206, to renew and expand the D.C. voucher program.

When Congress created the voucher program in 2003, the goal was to raise student achievement with a priority for students who attended “schools in need of improvement” (SINI) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). However, since it was put in place all four of the Congressionally-mandated Department of Education studies have concluded that the voucher program has had no significant effect on the overall academic achievement of these students.¹ In fact, a 2007 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that students from SINI were underrepresented in voucher schools.²

In all four years (2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010), the studies found no significant impact on math achievement of students who were in voucher schools compared to their peers in public schools. In years one and two, no significant impact was found on reading achievement. In year three and four, the study showed the reading achievement of some students improved, but it is noteworthy that students coming from SINI and those who enter the voucher program in the lower third of the test-score distribution—the very groups the program

¹ “Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report,” Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education, June 2010; “Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years,” Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, April 2009; “Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After Two Years,” Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2008; “Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impact After One Year,” Institute of Education Science, U.S. Department of Education, June 2007.

² “District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, Nov. 2007.



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Office of Advocacy

- Earl C. Rickman, III
President
- Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director
- Michael A. Resnick
Associate
Executive Director

National School Boards Association

1680 Duke Street ■ Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3493 ■ (703) 838-6722 ■ Fax: (703) 548-5613 ■ <http://www.nsba.org>

intended to help—showed no improvement in reading.³ The two groups of students who showed the most improvement in reading were students for which federal government intervention is the least justifiable: students who did not come from SINI and students who were already high performing when they entered the program.

In addition, all four studies found that participating in the voucher program had no impact on student safety, satisfaction, motivation or engagement.⁴ Students attending voucher schools also have less access to key services such as English as a second language programs, special education services, school nurses and counselors, child nutrition and after school programs and tutors.⁵

Not only does the experimental program lack academic evidence to support its continuation, the 2007 GAO report documented numerous accountability shortcomings, including federal taxpayer dollars paying tuition at private schools that do not even charge tuition, schools that lacked a legally-required city occupancy permit, and schools employing teachers without bachelor's degrees and/or certification.⁶ It also noted that children with physical or learning disabilities were underrepresented compared to public schools.⁷

Now is simply not the time to divert funding from public schools, which are increasingly held accountable for student achievement and preparing them to be college and career ready. It should be noted that as higher standards are the goal of public schools, private schools are not held to the same standards and accountability. More support for public schools is needed as educators and policymakers increasingly look to raise academic standards, teacher and principal effectiveness and graduation rates to ensure our students are competitive in the 21st Century global economy. They also must respond to increasing demands for services for special education and English language learners who generally do not meet the admissions standards of private schools. Whether it's in D.C. or elsewhere in the country, vouchers drain funds from public schools where the majority of American children attend to pay for private school tuition for a few.

NSBA believes strongly that the objective evidence does not support the continuation of the only federally-funded school voucher program. For these solid reasons, we urge you to oppose H.R. 471 or any efforts to renew D.C. vouchers.

Thank you for considering our views and please contact Katherine Shek, legislative analyst, at (703) 535-1627 or by email at kshek@nsba.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Resnick
Associate Executive Director

³ "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, April 2009; "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report," Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, June 2010.

⁴ 2010 U.S. Department of Education Report at xvi, xxii, xxiii; 2009 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxvi, xviii, 35, 44-45, 49-50; 2008 U.S. Department of Education Report at 42-43, 50, & 57; 2007 U.S. Department of Education Report at xix & 1-4.

⁵ 2010 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxvii; 2009 U.S. Department of Education Report at xxii & 17-18; 2008 U.S. Department of Education Report at xvii \$16; 2007 U.S. Department of Education Report at 21.

⁶ 2007 GAO Report at 22, 33-35.

⁷ 2007 GAO Report at 30.

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In all four years (2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010), the studies found no significant impact on math achievement of students who were in voucher schools compared to their peers in public schools. In years one and two, no significant impact was found on reading achievement. In year three and four, the study showed the reading achievement of some students improved, but it is noteworthy that students coming from SINI and those who enter the voucher program in the lower third of the test-score distribution—the very groups the program

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Now is simply not the time to divert funding from public schools, which are increasingly held accountable for student achievement and preparing them to be college and career ready. It should be noted that as higher standards are the goal of public schools, private schools are not held to the same standards and accountability. More support for public schools is needed as educators and policymakers increasingly look to raise academic standards, teacher and principal effectiveness and graduation rates to ensure our students are competitive in the 21st Century global economy. They also must respond to increasing demands for services for special education and English language learners who generally do not meet the admissions standards of private schools. Whether it's in D.C. or elsewhere in the country, vouchers drain funds from public schools where the majority of American children attend to pay for private school tuition for a few.

NSBA believes strongly that the objective evidence does not support the continuation of the only federally-funded school voucher program. For these solid reasons, we urge you to oppose H.R. 471 or any efforts to renew D.C. vouchers.

Thank you for considering our views and please contact Katherine Shek, legislative analyst, at (703) 535-1627 or by email at kshek@nsba.org if you have any questions.

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⁷ 2007 GAO Report at 30.

Written Testimony
of the
National Coalition for Public Education
Submitted to the
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of
Columbia, Census, and the National
Archives,
U.S. House of Representatives Committee
on Oversight and Government Reform
for the Hearing on
“The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program:
Keeping the Door Open”
March 1, 2011

The National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) submits this testimony to the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census, and the National Archives for its hearing on “The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Keeping the Door Open.” The National Coalition for Public Education is comprised of more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers. Although the priorities of NCPE’s member organizations greatly vary, we are united in our position against expanding the DC voucher program and, therefore, in opposing H.R. 471, the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act.

We strongly believe that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should not be reauthorized. The four federal Department of Education studies¹ and the 2007 General Accountability Office (GAO) study² prove that the program is not improving student achievement, access to student resources, student motivation, or student perceptions of safety. Rather than continuing to spend millions of dollars on a program that has proven ineffective and that is geared towards only helping a small fraction of D.C. students, we believe that the money should be redirected to programs that help improve public education for all students in the District.

We acknowledge that the Subcommittee may be able to point to some students who have gone to exemplary schools and seen improvement from the program. But according to government studies, these students are, unfortunately, the exception rather than the rule.

First, according to the GAO study, only 3% of the students in the program attended the elite D.C. schools that cost \$20,000 or more a year.³ And, the reason students can attend these schools is not so much the \$7,500 voucher as it is the additional \$12,500-plus they receive in scholarships from private programs or the private school itself. A more complete examination of the program, such as that which the GAO performed in 2007, shows that some children in the program have instead been sent to schools without occupancy certificates and to schools where over half the teachers lack bachelor’s degrees.⁴ Surely this is not a program that is serving the students well.

Second, the Department of Education studies show that the voucher program has not caused significant gains in academic achievement, increased educational resources, or improved the school environment. Accordingly expanding the program is not justified.

The DC Voucher Program

The five-year pilot program was authorized to provide private school vouchers worth up to

¹ U.S. Dep’t of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Final Report* (June 2010) (2010 U.S. Dep’t of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep’t of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 3 Years* (Apr. 2009) (2009 U.S. Dep’t of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep’t of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 2 Years* (June 2008) (2008 U.S. Dep’t of Educ. Report); U.S. Dep’t of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: Impact After 1 Year* (June 2007) (2007 U.S. Dep’t of Educ. Report).

² U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operation*, Publication No. 08-9, 34 (Nov. 2007) (GAO Report).

³ *Id.* at 31.

⁴ *Id.* at 34-35.

\$7,500 to approximately 1,700 students, at an annual cost of \$14 million. Although the program was scheduled to expire in 2008, the FY 2009, and FY 2010 appropriations bills and the 2011 continuing resolutions provided additional funding to allow for a smooth transition for students currently participating in the program. These appropriations bills stipulated that no new students could enter the program, but students already in the voucher program could maintain a voucher through high school graduation. The program now receives approximately \$13 million dollars a year to provide vouchers worth up to \$7,500 to approximately 1,000 students.

H.R.471 would increase the amount of each voucher and, therefore, the cost of the program overall. It would also lift the ban on new students, reviving the program even though Congress has previously decided to wind down the program due to its poor results.

The Value of Public Schools

Open and non-discriminatory in their acceptance of all students, American public schools are a unifying factor among the diverse range of ethnic and religious communities in our society. Public schools are the only schools that must meet the needs of all students. They do not turn children or families away. They serve children with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, those who are extremely gifted and those who are learning challenged, right along with children without special needs.

Vouchers undermine this vital function, however, by placing some of the most motivated students into private schools, leaving the students who are most difficult to educate behind in the public schools. Voucher programs also divert desperately needed resources away from the public school system to fund the education of a few voucher students. The government would better serve our children by using these funds to make the public schools stronger and safer.

Public schools are not failing. Rather, they are striving to respond to the swift, substantive changes in society and the calls for reform. We, as citizens, must create an environment of support so public schools can continue to change and improve. We must shift from attacking public schools to empowering continual public school improvement. Only then can we create the public will and motivation to accomplish for true reform.

The DC Voucher Program Has Not Improved Student Education

US Department of Education studies of the District of Columbia,⁵ like those studies of the Milwaukee⁶ and Cleveland⁷ school voucher programs, have concluded that students offered vouchers do not perform better in reading and math than students who are not part of the voucher program. The Department of Education studies also demonstrate that students who

⁵ 2010 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report, 2009 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report (Although 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); 2008 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report; 2007 U.S. Dep't of Educ. Report.

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 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).

entered the DC program from “schools in need of improvement” (SINI)—the program’s targeted students—also failed to show improvement in reading or math.⁸

According to these studies of the DC program, many of the children who left the DC voucher program actually did so because the voucher schools did not provide the academic support they needed: Of the students who left the voucher program in the first year, 45% stated that it was because the “child did not get the academic support he/she needed at the private school.”⁹ The number shot to 54% in the second year and was at 39% in the third year.¹⁰

Empirical evidence shows that students in the DC voucher program show no statistically significant improvement in academic achievement. At a time when Congress is considering major cuts in the federal domestic budget, these results do not justify new funding or an expansion of the program to new students.

The DC Voucher Program Has Not Improved Access to Academic Resources or the Learning Environment

Proponents of the DC voucher programs argue that the vouchers allow students to attend schools that are safer, provide better resources, and create a better learning environment. Again, studies of the programs prove this theory wrong.

Although the US Department of Education studies of the DC program show that parents believe that students in the voucher program are safer at school than those who did not participate, students have reported that participating in the program has had no impact on their actual school experience with dangerous activities.¹¹

Participation in the DC voucher program has also had no impact on student motivation and engagement.¹² The Department of Education studies found that participating in the program has had no statistically significant impacts on students’ aspirations for the future, frequency of doing homework, time spent reading for fun, engagement in extracurricular activities, or attendance or tardiness rates.¹³

In addition, the DC voucher program fails to offer participating students greater educational resources. In fact, the Department of Education studies of the DC 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.¹⁴

⁸ 2010 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 34; 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. at 34; 2008 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 34, 36-38; 2007 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 36-38; xvii, 44, 46.

⁹ 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 25.

¹⁰ *Id.* The option of “child did not get the academic support he/she needed at the private school” was not listed in the 2010 study.

¹¹ 2010 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xvi, 44-52; 2009 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxvi, xxviii, 44-45, 49-50; U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at 42-43, 50; 2007 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xx, 1-4.

¹² 2010 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxvii, 19-20; 56-60; 2009 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxxii, 55-56; 2008 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxvi, 57-58, F-6.

¹³ 2010 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxvii, 19-20; 56-60; 2009 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxxii, 55-56; 2008 U.S. Dep’t of Ed. Report at xxvi, 57-58, F-6.

¹⁴ Final US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 20; 2009 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at xxii, 17; 2008 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at xviii, 16. The 2010 Report found a decrease in access to tutors, but no “significant” reduction in tutors. Final US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 20.

Furthermore, voucher programs do not provide participating students with better teachers than are available at the public schools. To the contrary, the report issued by the GAO found that, at some schools, less than half of the teachers had even obtained a bachelor's degree.¹⁵ And, the 2009 Department of Education study revealed that the students participating in the voucher program rated their teacher's attitude no better than students who did not participate in the program.¹⁶

Again, proponents' claims are not supported by the federal studies. Voucher schools provided no better resources to students than the public schools. In fact, voucher schools, in many areas, offered DC students fewer resources. Again, the program results do not justify renewal and expansion of the program.

The DC Voucher Program Lacks Oversight, Accountability, and Internal Controls

The DC voucher program also has serious accountability problems. First, the GAO found that the grant Administrator had not ensured that the participating schools adhered to the rules of the program or even DC laws. For example, the administrator permitted schools to participate—and allowed students to attend schools—even though they lacked a valid DC occupancy certificate, failed to submit required financial data, and failed to submit required annual reports on operational reports with basic information on curriculum, teachers' education, and school facilities.¹⁷ Indeed, some participating schools failed to submit information on accreditation or educational soundness, yet voucher students were directed to and attended those schools.¹⁸

The grant administrator also paid tuition for students to schools that actually did not charge tuition and made disbursements to other schools without requiring them to submit the proper paperwork.¹⁹

The GAO report also criticized the grant administrator for providing inaccurate, misleading, and incomplete information to parents about the participating schools.²⁰ Indeed, the administrator incorrectly reported information on some schools that could have significantly affected parents' choice of schools, such as the percentage of teachers who had at least a bachelor's degree and tuition rates.²¹

Students Using Vouchers at Private Schools Lose Rights and Protections

Despite receiving public money, private schools that participate in DC voucher programs are not subject to all federal civil rights laws, and do not face the same public accountability standards, including those in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, Title IX, and IDEA that all public schools must meet. Private religious schools may discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion and on gender in admissions.²² Private religious schools also are not subject to the DC Human Right Act.

¹⁵ U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Additional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls and Program Operation*, Publication No. 08-9, 34 (Nov. 2007) (GAO Report).

¹⁶ 2009 U.S. Dep't of Ed. Report at xxxii, 25, 55-56.

¹⁷ GAO Report at 34-35.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 34.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 22-23, 33.

²⁰ *Id.* at 36.

²¹ *Id.*

²² P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004).

Private voucher schools also do not have to comply with the same teacher standards, curriculum, and testing requirements as the public schools. And, students who attend private schools with vouchers are stripped of their First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights offered to them in public schools. Unfortunately, many parents and students are not even aware of this when they accept the voucher.

Voucher Schools Can Pick and Choose Among Students

Voucher schools can reject students based on prior academic achievement, economic background, English language ability, or disciplinary history. Also, under the program, religious schools can discriminate against students on the basis of gender.²³ In contrast, public schools serve all students in DC

Certain groups of DC students have less access to voucher schools than others. For example, students with special needs often cannot find a private school that can or want to serve them: The Department of Education Reports show that a significant number of students had to reject their voucher because they were “unable to find a participating school that offered services for their child’s learning or physical disability or other special needs.”²⁴ Indeed, the Final Department of Education Report concluded that 21.6% of the parents who rejected a voucher that was offered to their child did so because the school lacked the special needs services that their child needed.²⁵ And, 12.3% of the parents who accepted a voucher for their child but then left the program cited a lack of special needs services.²⁶

High school students also have less access to voucher schools: “For the school year 2005-2006, only about 70 openings were available at the high school level.”²⁷

Students seeking non-religious schools also “have a limited number to choose from, since most participating private schools were Catholic or Protestant, and these schools offered the most openings. The remaining schools included some that were Afro-centric or Muslim, or offered only early childhood education.”²⁸ Indeed, the final Department of Education report found that 80% of the students in the program attended a faith-based school.²⁹

Vouchers Primarily Fund Religious Schools

Many of the members of our coalition object to taxpayer funds going towards religious education. Although the religious groups in our coalition value religious education and recognize that parochial schools can serve a valuable role for many children, they also recognize that because most parochial schools either cannot or do not wish to separate the religious components of the education they offer from the academic programs, these schools must be funded by voluntary contributions, not taxation.

²³ P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004).

²⁴ 2008 US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 22.

²⁵ Final US Dep’t of Ed. Report at 24-26.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ GAO Report at 31.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Final US Dep’t of Educ. Report at 18.

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. Indeed, approximately 80% of the students participating in the DC voucher program attend religious schools. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another's religious education.

Religious organizations and schools that rely on voluntary participation and contributions are likely to flourish. Government funds, however, threaten to shift religious schools' monetary source from the followers of their religion to the government treasury. And, with that shift, they also risk losing their religious identity, teachings, and message. To remain healthy, a religious school should follow the dictates of its adherents rather than the dictates of a government uninterested in its religious mission. To do this, they must reject government funding.

Conclusion

For all of the above reasons, NCPE opposes the reauthorization of the DC voucher program. In these times, when Congress is considering major cuts in the federal domestic budget, we believe that this is one program that has not demonstrated success and that reauthorizing and increasing the funding for new students to enter the program is not the best use of limited federal funds.

For more information on the organizations opposing the DC voucher, please see the attached letter signed by 47 diverse organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on this important matter.

Written Testimony of
 Americans United for Separation of Church and State
 Submitted to
 U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
 Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census, and the National Archives
 for the Hearing Record on
 "The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Keeping the Door Open"
 March 1, 2011

Americans United for Separation of Church and State submits this testimony to the US House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census, and the National Archives for a hearing entitled: "The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Keeping the Door Open." Americans United opposes reauthorizing and expanding the DC voucher program not only because it raises constitutional and civil rights concerns, but also because it has simply proven ineffective. Indeed, extending the program would defy the lessons learned from the current pilot program—that vouchers do not improve the education of DC students.

The DC voucher program was established in 2003 (passing by just one vote in the US House of Representatives) as a five-year pilot program slated to expire in 2008. Nonetheless, the FY 2009 and FY 2010 appropriations bills and the FY2011 continuing resolutions provided additional funding to allow for a smooth transition for students currently participating in the program. These appropriations bills, however, stipulated that no new students could enter the program—only students already in the voucher program are eligible to receive a voucher in the future. The program currently receives approximately \$13 million dollars to provide vouchers worth up to \$7,500 to approximately 1,300 students.

During its five-year pilot, the voucher program has proven ineffective and, thus, should not be restarted and expanded by Congress. First, reports issued by the Department of Education in 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 all indicate that the program has not lived up to the promises made by proponents and make the case against reauthorization or expansion. **The Final 2010 Report concluded that the use of a voucher had no statistically significant impact on overall student achievement in math or reading.**¹ In addition, all four studies found that students from "schools in need of improvement," which are the students targeted by the program, have shown no improvement in reading or math due to the voucher program.² Furthermore, participating in the voucher program **had no impact on student safety, satisfaction, motivation, or engagement.**³

¹ US Dep't of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report*, xv, xix, 34 (June 2010) (*Final US Dep't of Educ. Report*).

² *Final US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 34; US Dep't of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* 34 (March 2009) (2009 *US Dep't of Educ. Report*); US Dep't of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Two Years*, 34, 36-38 (June 2008) (2008 *US Dep't of Educ. Report*); US Dep't of Educ., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year* xvii, 44, 46 (June 2007) (2007 *US Dep't of Educ. Report*).

³ *Final US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 43-47; 2009 *US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xxvi, xviii, 35, 44-45, 49-50; 2008 *US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 42-43, 50, 57; 2007 *US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xx, 53-55.

A November 2007 Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report was also critical of the DC program. The study found that "accountability and internal control were inadequate."⁴ For example, federal tax dollars were paid to private schools that did not even charge tuition and to schools that employed teachers who lacked bachelor's degrees.⁵ The report also found that parents were given "incomplete," "inaccurate," and even "misleading" information about the private schools their children attended.⁶ Furthermore, the study concluded that the voucher program has not met its goal of serving students in schools in need of improvement: less than one-quarter of the students offered vouchers under the program were from these schools.⁷

On all counts—improving achievement, using funds effectively, and providing opportunities for students in schools in need of improvement—the DC voucher program has failed. Accordingly, reauthorizing the program is unjustified.

The DC voucher scheme permits religious schools that accept vouchers to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and on the basis of gender in admission.⁸ A central principle of our constitutional order, however, is that "the Constitution does not permit the State to aid discrimination."⁹ 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—all students should be treated the same regardless of sex and all teachers the same regardless of religion. Taxpayer money should not fund programs that harm the fundamental civil rights of students and teachers.

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**.¹⁰ 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.

The federal 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 DC students.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program* 36 (Nov. 2007).

⁵ *Id.* at 22-33, 33, 34.

⁶ *Id.* at 36.

⁷ *Id.* at 23-24, 26, 28.

⁸ P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004).

⁹ *Norwood v. Harrison*, 413 U.S. 455, 465-66 (1973).

¹⁰ Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, 1789.



American Association of School Administrators

February 28, 2011

Member
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the National Archives
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), representing more than 13,000 school administrators across the nation, we urge you to oppose any efforts to reinstate, renew or expand the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Recently introduced legislation known as the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act is under consideration in your committee. This legislation would reauthorize the failed District of Columbia private school voucher pilot, allow new students to enter the program, and increase the public funds these students can spend on private education.

AASA believes that public dollars should be used for public education. Providing additional federal dollars for private school vouchers when current funding commitments to America's public schools are not being met by the federal government is irresponsible, if not unconscionable. In a time when every federal dollar matters and funding for critical public school funding such as Title I is under threat, now is not the time to continue the diversion of scarce taxpayer dollars to private schools, especially to a program that has failed to demonstrate academic gains for participating students.

The program is currently provided \$13.2 million to fund vouchers for existing students. These provisions include sunset provisions, however, stipulating that no new students would be added to the program and that students currently enrolled would be able to remain in their private school. AASA is comfortable with the current compromise of allowing current students to remain in this program and we urge you to maintain the status quo, especially in this tight fiscal environment.

Multiple independent government evaluations demonstrate that D.C. students enrolled in the private school voucher program are not achieving at a greater rate than their public school peers. Evaluations of the Opportunity Scholarship Program consistently found no academic difference for the target population of students in English or math, students who originally attended schools failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress.

In addition, the SOAR legislation does not require that D.C. private schools be held to the same accountability standards as D.C. public schools. Private schools are not required to have the same level of transparency and reporting to the public. In addition, private schools are not subject to the requirements of No Child Left Behind or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. As

Congressional expectations of public school districts continue to rise, it is inequitable to have different expectations for private schools receiving federal dollars.

With limited federal dollars we must invest available funding into the public school districts that help a larger percentage of children. Scarce taxpayer dollars should be focused on interventions to improve education for all students, rather than diverting funds to let a select few out of the public system.

Once again, we urge you to focus on the education that affects the majority of school children: please oppose sending taxpayer dollars to private schools through the D.C. private school voucher expired pilot program.

If you need any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us (nellerson@aasa.org or sbartolf@aasa.org).

Sincerely,

Noelle Ellerson
Assistant Director, Policy Analysis & Advocacy

Sasha Bartolf
Legislative Specialist



**Written Testimony of the
American Association of University Women**

before the

United States House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the National Archives

Hearing on

“The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship: Keeping the Door Open”

February 28, 2011

Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the subcommittee thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the hearing “The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship: Keeping the Door Open.”

The American Association of University Women is a membership organization founded in 1881 with approximately 100,000 members and 1000 branches nationwide. AAUW has a proud 130-year history of breaking through barriers for women and girls and has always been a strong supporter of public education. Today, AAUW continues its mission through education, research, and advocacy.

The American Association of University Women stands firmly by the belief that the country should provide an excellent education for all children, not private school vouchers for a few. AAUW believes a strong, free public education system is the foundation of a democratic society, and has long opposed diverting public funds to private or religious elementary and secondary schools. The 1937 AAUW legislative program called for “free public instruction of high quality available to all, since popular education is the basis for freedom and justice,” and in 1955 stated “universal education is basic to the preservation of our form of government and to the well-being of our society.” Today, AAUW’s 2007-2009 Public Policy Program clearly states AAUW’s “...opposition to the use of public funds for nonpublic elementary and secondary education.”¹

While AAUW supports innovative techniques to improve America’s schools, we believe voucher proposals fly in the face of our nation’s commitment to public education. AAUW does not oppose public school choice programs, which allow students to choose a public school in their school district. However, in many areas of the country the notion of “private school choice” is

misleading because there are few, if any, private schools or because the only private schools are religiously affiliated and not the appropriate denomination for the family.

From AAUW's perspective, regardless of the constitutionality of certain voucher programs, such schemes are not sound education policy.

AAUW Opposes Vouchers

- Private and religious schools are not required to observe federal nondiscrimination laws, such as Title IX. In fact, voucher proposals often contain language specifically intended to circumvent civil rights laws, and many proponents insist voucher funding does not flow to the school but instead to the parent or student precisely to avoid any civil rights obligations. This specificity in language allows private institutions to discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, disability and language proficiency. Further, private and religious schools can reject a student based on the school's own admissions criteria and discriminate against a student in access to classes, guidance counseling, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of education.
- Private and religious schools are not held to the same accountability and testing standards established in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Such schools do not have to hire "highly qualified" teachers, adhere to NCLB testing requirements and Adequate Yearly Progress, or disaggregate or publicly release student achievement results.
- Funding for NCLB is woefully inadequate, and the additional diversion of needed resources would further diminish public schools' ability to meet mandated accountability standards and address achievement gaps among students. Over the course of its existence, NCLB has been underfunded to the tune of over \$85 billion.²
- Our country's public schools already face teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and increased accountability without adequate funding. Diverting critical resources from the school systems that educate 90 percent of America's students is not a fiscally sound investment.³
- Private and religious school voucher programs weaken the public school system by diverting these already scarce funds that could otherwise be used for needed teacher training, smaller class sizes, expanded support services, and improved facilities.
- Private school vouchers do not raise student achievement. A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education compared the effectiveness of public schools to that of private institutions. After controlling for critical demographic factors (parents' income, education level, number of books in household), NCES found that public schools perform as well as, and even better in a few instances, than private schools.⁴ A 2001 GAO study confirmed that the official evaluations of Cleveland's and Milwaukee's voucher programs found no differences in the achievement of voucher students compared to public school students, despite built-in applicant screening advantages for private schools.⁵

- Vouchers are taxpayers' dollars spent according to the policies of a private school board—not the decisions of a democratically elected and publicly accessible school board. Private and religious schools are not required to meet basic accountability provisions, such as open meetings and records laws, or to publicly release test scores, dropout rates, and other basic information. Because private schools are not accountable to the public at large, taxpayers lose public oversight for the expenditure of their tax dollars.
- Vouchers disproportionately help families with children already in private schools or those who have never attended public schools. At the inception of the Cleveland “Scholarship and Tutoring Program,” 39 percent of students used their vouchers to continue their attendance in private or religious schools, and another 40 percent were attending school for the first time.⁶

Voucher Proposals Unpopular in Public Opinion Polls and Ballot Initiatives

- A 2001 poll conducted by the National School Boards Association and Zogby International revealed that voters preferred strategies to invest in public education like reducing class size (27 percent), improving teacher quality (27 percent), and increasing teacher training (23 percent) over voucher schemes (13 percent).⁷
- A 2006 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll found that 71 percent of Americans would prefer improving existing public schools over “finding an alternative to the existing public school system.”⁸
- In November 2007, Utah voters rejected a voucher proposal that would have made vouchers available to all students. This marked 11 out of 11 tries that voucher state ballot initiatives have been decisively rejected by voters.⁹ In most cases, the \$3,000 voucher would not cover even half of private school tuition which is estimated to be as much as \$8,000 annually. The initiative was defeated by a 25 percentage point margin with every county in the state voting against the voucher proposal.¹⁰

District of Columbia School Voucher Program

In 2003, a private school voucher program was created for the District of Columbia school system; it was intended as a five-year pilot research project scheduled to expire in 2008. This represents the first time in history that federal dollars have been used to fund private school vouchers. In the 109th, 110th, and 111th Congresses, several attempts to expand the program were proposed. While many of these attempts were thwarted, the 109th Congress did approve expanding eligibility for families already enrolled for the first two years of the program from 185 percent of the federal poverty level to 300 percent of FPL, turning what was pitched as a program to subsidize tuition for low-income families into a program that funds private education for middle-class families that often could afford the tuition anyway. With these precedents laid, voucher proponents have been emboldened to further divert taxpayer dollars to pay for private education. The program, which currently receives approximately \$13 million, provides vouchers of up to \$7,500 a piece to about 1,000 students.

AAUW urges Congress to oppose the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (H.R. 471). The legislation would reauthorize the failed District of Columbia private school voucher pilot

program and allow new students into the program, increase the number of students who receive vouchers, and increase the voucher amount. AAUW has opposed continuation of the expired voucher program and we strongly oppose reauthorizing the program. This program funnels taxpayer money to private schools that do not have to follow many civil rights laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal funding.

While implemented, the District of Columbia private school voucher “pilot” program has not performed in the ways the law was intended. A 2005 report found that fewer than 75 of the more than 1,300 students who received vouchers came from public schools that were determined to be most in need of improvement by federal law.¹¹ At the same time, more than 200 students who received vouchers were already enrolled in private schools. The unfortunate irony is that the number of students already in private schools receiving vouchers was almost three times the number of students coming from schools in need of improvement—the students who were purportedly the target of the program.¹²

While AAUW’s general concerns about vouchers as discussed above apply to this program, we are especially troubled that most of the private schools that receive funding under the program do not have to follow Title IX. Title IX is the federal civil rights law prohibiting sex-discrimination in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. The only private schools in the program that have to comply with Title IX are schools that receive federal money in addition to the voucher funding. While commonly known for creating opportunities for women and girls in athletics, Title IX affects all areas of education. It has made it possible for women to pursue careers as lawyers, doctors, mechanics, scientists, and professional athletes. Because schools that participate in this voucher program are exempt from Title IX, they can discriminate based on gender. This means schools can base admissions decisions on gender, limit opportunities for girls to play athletics, and base curriculum on outdated gender stereotypes. By exempting schools under this program from Title IX, the voucher program creates an environment that is not only ripe for gender discrimination, but has no protections in place should that discrimination occur.

In addition to civil rights concerns, the DC voucher program has not been shown to improve academic achievement. In June 2010, the Department of Education released its final report on the District of Columbia voucher program, finding that there was “no conclusive evidence that the OSP [Opportunity Scholarship Program] affected student achievement. . . The same pattern of results holds for students who applied from schools in need of improvement (SINI), the group Congress designated as the highest priority for the Program.”¹³ This report’s conclusions coincide with the Department’s previous studies of the program. In an April 2009 report, the Department found no improvement in academic achievement for those students receiving vouchers from public schools in need of improvement – the target audience of the voucher program.¹⁴ An earlier report from June 2008 found that “after 2 years, there was no statistically significant difference in test scores in general between students who were offered an OSP [Opportunity Scholarship Program] scholarship and students who were not offered a scholarship.” In these tight fiscal times, why would Congress expand and increase funding for a program that does not increase achievement? In addition, while “the Program had a positive impact on overall parent satisfaction and parent perceptions of school safety . . . [s]tudents had a

different view of their schools than did their parents.” Overall, student satisfaction was unaffected by the voucher program.¹⁵

In addition, a November 2007 GAO report revealed numerous problems with the District of Columbia voucher program, including a lack of detailed fiscal policies and not adhering to procedures for making scholarship payments. The report also found that many of the participating schools conducted classes in unsuitable learning environments taught by teachers lacking bachelor’s degrees. In many cases, parents were not informed of these deficiencies.¹⁶

Although the program expired in 2008, it continues to receive funding. In addition, the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act and FY2011 continuing resolutions included language to ensure that only students who received vouchers in the previous year would continue to receive vouchers. As a response to past reports and hearings on the DC voucher program’s deficiencies, the appropriations language also states that schools must maintain a valid certificate of occupancy, core subject teachers must have a four-year bachelor’s degree, and schools must be in compliance with the accreditation standards in the District of Columbia. In addition, voucher students must take the same academic tests as those administered to students in DC public schools.

AAUW will continue to urge Congress and the Obama Administration to stop the expansion of the DC voucher program – a program which does not work and has already expired. AAUW believes the appropriate strategy for improving our nation’s schools is to direct resources toward improving public schools, rather than diverting public funds into private institutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

¹ American Association of University Women. (August 2007). *2007-09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved December 6, 2007, from http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf.

² National Education Association. (February 4, 2008). *Funding Gap: No Child Left Behind*. Retrieved April 27, 2009, from <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/fundinggap.pdf>.

³ National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The Condition of Education 2007*. Retrieved December 4, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007064.pdf>. The 90 percent statistic is derived from this table, which shows total private school enrollment at 9.7 percent.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (July 2006). *Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling*. Retrieved December 4, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2006461.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Government Accounting Office. (August 2001). *School Vouchers: Publicly Funded Programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee*. GAO-01-914 Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01914.pdf>.

⁶ Schiller, Zach and Policy Matters Ohio. (September 2001). *Cleveland School Vouchers: Where the Students Come From*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.policymattersohio.org/voucherintro.html>.

⁷ National School Board Association/Zogby International Poll. (September 25, 2001). *School Vouchers: What the Public Thinks and Why*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from <http://www.nsba.org/MainMenu/Advocacy/FederalLaws/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/NSBAAdvocacyToolsonVouchers/NSBANationalpollonschoolvouchers.aspx>.

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⁹ National School Boards Association. (November 7, 2007). *Utah Voters’ Defeat School Vouchers*. Retrieved January 2, 2008, from

http://vocuspr.vocus.com/vocuspr30/Newsroom/Query.aspx?SiteName=NSBANew&Entity=PRASSET&SF_PRASSETID_EQ=108422&XSL=PressRelease&Cache=False.

¹⁰ Crawford, Grigs, (November 7, 2007). *Taxes, Stem Cell Funding, School Vouchers Rebuffed in Ballot Measure Voting*. Retrieved December 5, 2007 from <http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?parm1=5&docID=news-000002623685>.

¹¹ People for the American Way Foundation. (February 2005). *Flaws and Failings: A Preliminary Look at the Problems Already Encountered in the Implementation of the District of Columbia's New Federally Mandated School Voucher Program*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report_flaws_and_failings.

¹² People for the American Way Foundation. (February 2005). *Flaws and Failings: A Preliminary Look at the Problems Already Encountered in the Implementation of the District of Columbia's New Federally Mandated School Voucher Program*. Retrieved December 5, 2007, from http://site.pfaw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=report_flaws_and_failings.

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Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was intrigued, as I listened to you in your opening comments, because I too, like your father, grew up in rural America, went to a one-room school where one teacher, Ms. B.D. King, taught eight grades plus what we called the little primer and the big primer, all at the same time. So I share your commitment to education.

However, as a staunch supporter of public education, I am not in favor of escalating private school vouchers at this time because what they mean to me is that fewer taxpayer dollars for traditional schools will be reduced or diminished. However, I am in favor of improving education across the board so that every child in the District of Columbia would have optimal opportunity to have the kind of experience, educational experience, that would prepare him or her for everything that they would want to be, do, and accomplish in life.

Improving public education in the District of Columbia is in the rest of the Nation's, has been, and will remain a long and difficult climb. The Federal Government has played a critical role in providing the District schools with badly needed funding since 2004. The city deserves recognition for prioritizing, turning around its schools, and for the improvements it has made. For this reason, I do feel that it would have been helpful for the committee to have heard from the mayor of the city and other elected leaders on this important topic.

I commend the students and parents here today for their advocacy of expanded educational opportunities and for your personal commitment to getting the best education that you can for yourselves and for your children. However, I am concerned that there are no parents of students here to advocate for the public schools. Families from those schools also have wonderful stories to tell about exceptional teachers and successful innovative teaching practices. Allowing Federal dollars to fund private schools diverts attention and resources away from private schools that educate the vast majority of students in our country.

If we have limited Federal dollars for education, we should focus on fixing the public schools that are not performing well and aiding their students rather than undermining those schools by syphoning not only off scarce Federal dollars, but in some instances the mix of students who would add to the dimension and opportunities of acquiring a great education for all.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I would like to reserve the balance of my time to be added to that of Representative Norton when she has a time to make her remarks.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Davis.

The Chair would recognize the gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Ms. Holmes Norton.

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

I appreciate my very good conversation with Chairman Gowdy when I learned that the chairman had not received two requests I left with his office on Friday to call me after Mayor Vincent Gray was denied the courtesy that has always been given to the mayor of the District of Columbia, whatever party controlled the Congress and, for that matter, to most busy, highly placed public officials whose time is charged to the taxpayers. I also learned that Chair-

man Gowdy did not make the decision concerning the appearance of Mayor Gray.

What was gained by denying the mayor's two separate attempts to get small changes that would have enabled them to testify here today except to make it impossible for him to testify as a minority witness against the bill before us, or if he did testify, to try to humiliate him and to disrespect his office? Instead of the courtesy of a routine accommodation by being placed early enough to be heard, the mayor was offered the option of being the last witness on a panel with his constituents, with no guarantee that he could be heard early enough to get back to urgent city business he had offered to push back for a reasonable period.

In 20 years of service in the Congress, I have never seen any highly placed public official treated so shabbily. The discourteous response to our mayor's request was inconsistent with past practice of this committee and its subcommittees. It was offensive, petty, and beneath the dignity of any committee of the Congress.

I knew that this response could not have come from the new chairman. At Chairman Gowdy's request, I took him to Mayor Gray's office just 2 weeks ago and he and the mayor had a very cordial meeting. Considering Mayor Gray's respect for Chairman Gowdy, I know that the mayor wants to put this matter behind him so that he can continue the cordial relationship that began when Chairman Gowdy visited the mayor's office. I ask unanimous consent that the mayor's statement concerning this bill be entered into the record of today's hearing.

Mr. GOWDY. Without objection, it will be made part of the record.

[The referenced information follows:]

[NOTE.—NO INSERT/INFORMATION PROVIDED.]

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to be clear that my remarks today are addressed to my colleagues, not to my constituents who desire better education. I too am a mother, and I cannot blame any parent for taking advantage of any educational opportunity that comes your way. Although I am a proud graduate of the D.C. public schools and strongly support our public schools, I have always supported public charter school alternatives for those parents who are dissatisfied with our traditional public schools. Children cannot wait until public schools, now in the throws of a race to the top, meet the necessary standards.

This is true even though the D.C. public schools have made impressive strides by any measure. For example, notwithstanding the many improvements the D.C. public schools must make, the National Assessment of Education Progress, which recently measured math progress in the Nation's public schools, found the D.C. public schools to be the only schools in the Nation to improve average math scores at both fourth and eighth grade levels by at least 5 points.

However, the Department of Education's final report on the Opportunity Scholarship Program did not report the results we are seeing in the District's chosen alternatives to our traditional public schools, our public charter schools. The Department of Education's report found "no conclusive evidence that the Opportunity Scholar-

ship Program affected student achievement as measured by standardized reading and mathematics tests.”

Yet, this program was established precisely to measure the difference between the academic performance of students in the lowest performing public schools and those in the private school program. Unlike the private schools, our public charter middle and high schools, with a majority of economically disadvantaged students, scored almost twice as high as their D.C. public school counterparts in math and reading, and the graduation rate of charter schools in the District is 24 percent higher than the graduation rate of the public high schools and 8 percent higher than the nationwide graduation rate.

Yet, our public charter schools have a significantly higher percentage of African-Americans and of disadvantaged children than our D.C. public schools. Of particular importance, unlike our private schools, D.C. public schools are fully accountable to the public in measures of performance and in every activity. Both public and public charter schools can and have been closed when acceptable standards have not been met. D.C. public charter schools, on average, have a remarkable record, but they are quick to concede that not all of them meet high standards.

However, with this record of the D.C.’s own public charter schools, not a couple thousand students, but almost 28,000 students in these schools with this record, why would Congress target the District of Columbia for private school vouchers? Moreover, the continuing focus on private school vouchers exclusively for the District of Columbia comes despite a compromise that allows every D.C. student now in the program to be funded until graduation from high school. That compromise, in turn, followed a prior compromise to extend the program 2 years beyond the authorized 5-year cutoff date.

What is before us today is the startup of a brand new program for new children, and, again, only in the District of Columbia. The single-minded focus on public funding of private schools only in the District raises many questions. If my Republican colleagues believe private school vouchers are so important, why haven’t they used the experiment here in the District to offer a national bill on the floor, allowing school districts that might choose vouchers? Could it be that the majority is influenced by State referenda on vouchers, all of which have been lost by voucher performance? Could it be that the Republican majority has read the national polls showing that the American people overwhelmingly oppose public funding of private schools?

If the Republican majority is truly concerned about alternatives to public education, why are they not expanding funding for public charter schools which have a large congressional bipartisan majority both in the House and the Senate? The inescapable conclusion is that the Republicans believe they can indulge their personal and ideological preferences with impunity here in the District, a risk they are unwilling to take in their own districts with private school vouchers.

The Republicans did not consult the District’s elected officials before introducing a bill to startup a new voucher program. Yet, the desperate budget situation in the District has put most in the coun-

cil in a position of appearing to reverse their position against vouchers that they previously took in letters to me when D.C. residents mounted one of the largest protests during my——

I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks.

Mr. MCHENRY. Reserving the right to object. How much longer does the gentlelady expect to talk?

Ms. NORTON. The gentlelady expects to talk only about a minute longer.

Mr. MCHENRY. I ask unanimous consent for one additional minute.

Mr. GOWDY. One additional minute.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the gentleman. There is a history to this, and I appreciate it.

I was speaking of the reversal of some members of the council on the position they previously took opposing vouchers in letters to me at a time when a huge demonstration was mounted here in the Congress by residents against imposing vouchers on the District. They can hardly be blamed for this change of mind. They certainly know that it would do very little good to lobby the House for any new funding for the home rule choice of our parents for independent public school alternatives.

However, this is exactly what Speaker Newt Gingrich did. When he first mentioned private school vouchers to me, I told him of public opposition to vouchers in the city, but not to public charter schools.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to use my time to question witnesses to complete my statement. I think this is important history for people to understand.

Mr. GOWDY. Yes, ma'am. You are welcome to do that.

We will now go to the testimony, and it is my pleasure to introduce the panel. I will introduce the panel in whole, and then we will start with you, Mr. Holassie, and go in that order. How is that? Does that sound good?

All right, we are pleased to have Mr. Ronald Holassie, who is a senior at Archbishop Carroll High School and a District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program recipient since the sixth grade.

To his left and our right is Ms. Lesly Alvarez. She is an eighth grader at Sacred Heart School and a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program recipient.

Ms. Sheila Jackson is the mother of an OSP student, Shawnee, who is in the 10th grade at Preparatory School of District of Columbia.

And Ms. Latasha Bennett is a single mother of two children, Nico received an Opportunity Scholarship Program, while Nia was one of the 216 students whose scholarship was retracted. However, through donations her family receives, Nia is able to attend the same school as her brother.

Welcome to all four of you and, Mr. Holassie, we will recognize you for your 5 minute opening statement.

Before we do that, because it is a policy of the committee to swear the witnesses, we will ask you to rise and lift your right hands.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. GOWDY. Let the record reflect all witnesses answered in the affirmative. You may be seated and, Mr. Holassie, you may begin.

STATEMENTS OF RONALD HOLASSIE, SENIOR AT ARCHBISHOP CARROLL HIGH SCHOOL AND DC OSP RECIPIENT SINCE THE 6TH GRADE; LESLY ALVAREZ, 8TH GRADE STUDENT AT SACRED HEART SCHOOL, AND DC OSP RECIPIENT; SHEILA JACKSON, MOTHER OF AN OSP STUDENT, SHAWNEE, WHO IS IN THE 10TH GRADE AT PREPARATORY SCHOOL OF DC; AND LATASHA BENNETT, SINGLE MOTHER OF TWO, NICO RECEIVES AN OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP, WHILE NIA WAS ONE OF THE 216 STUDENTS WHOSE SCHOLARSHIP WAS RETRACTED; HOWEVER, THROUGH DONATIONS HER FAMILY RECEIVES, NIA IS ABLE TO ATTEND THE SAME SCHOOL AS HER BROTHER

STATEMENT OF RONALD HOLASSIE

Mr. HOLASSIE. Chairman Gowdy and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Ronald Holassie. I have served as D.C.'s Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislation for 2 years. I am now a senior at Archbishop Carroll High School.

My journey with the Washington, DC, Opportunity Scholarship Program began 6 years ago, when I was 13. I was raised in a single parent household with my mother and younger brother. I faced many challenges in the public school system. I attended various D.C. public schools during elementary school. Altercations with other students and a lack of academic achievement resulted in me switching to different schools around D.C. But it seemed that I was faced with the same problems at each new school.

Then 1 day my mother saw an ad for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. She quickly applied, and soon after I was accepted and given a scholarship to attend any private school of our choice in D.C. My mother now had a chance to send me to a school she knew would fit me best. The scholarship covered tuition, books and my uniform. My mother saw it as a blessing and an answer of prayer from God for her child. She always wanted me to have a quality education.

When I received my scholarship, I was so far behind that the school asked me to repeat the sixth grade. The first few months were very different, as the expectations and standards were much higher. The discipline in the school was also much stricter. Adjusting to the new school wasn't easy; it took time. I had to catch up and get on the academic level I needed to be on and fulfill the expectations of the new school. But it all didn't happen that fast. It took some years and hard work and dedication. There was a transition stage that I had to undergo. It took some time to adjust to the new standards and expectations, but I soon adjusted well.

When I entered high school, I was quite nervous and didn't really know what to expect. Being at Archbishop Carroll High School shaped me academically, shaped me to perform academically with my greatest potential. As I am now a senior at Archbishop Carroll High School finishing up my last year, I am ready to take on the

world and new opportunities. I credit the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program for my success.

This program has worked, is still working, and will continue to work. It is a must to reauthorize the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Everyone deserves a choice and should have the right of school choice and opportunity. As I said before unto the U.S. Senate “public schools did not get bad overnight and they are not going to get better overnight.” So we need to take action now and have a program installed to give children a quality education such as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Reauthorization of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is critical. We should always have options, and this program is an option for parents and students.

Looking back, I can see throughout the past years I have evolved so much and at the same time dealt with many obstacles. As a young child, many challenges came before me in which I had to undergo hardships and persevere. Through all the pain, suffering, and tears, I am still standing. Not just standing but standing strong ready to take on the world and achieve much more.

As a young man, I see a future ahead of me and a vision of a successful life. I feel as if all these years served as preparation for the real world. I am now confident that I can go out into the world and make something out of my life, and that I will not only impact people here in the United States, but around the world.

I made it this far and nothing can stop me now from succeeding. Not a single voice or action of opposition can stop my success, nor the success of thousands of children who have the opportunity to choose a school that is best for them.

It is not just about me and my story, as I am now a senior, months away from graduating. I am here for not only myself and the students currently enrolled in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, but the thousands of children who have not been given the same opportunity.

I am here to fight for quality education and have the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program reauthorized, as it needs to be. I am a product of this program, a successful result. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided the education that has shaped me into being the intelligent, ambitious, person that is in front of you all now. The results of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program are certainly life-changing. Now being a young adult, taking on my own responsibilities, I have certainly been greatly influenced by this program. I can look back and credit this program for my success.

It's not just what this program does academically, but it is how it impacts an individual's life through education. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Holassie follows:]

TESTIMONY OF RONALD HOLASSIE

**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and
the National Archives**

MARCH 1, 2011

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to the new school wasn't easy; it took time. I had to catch up and get on the academic level I needed to be on and fulfill the expectations of the new school. But it all didn't happen that fast. It took some years and hard work and dedication. There was a transition stage that I had to undergo. It took some time to adjust to the new standards and expectations but I soon adjusted well.

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I am here to fight for quality education and have the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program reauthorized as it needs to be. I am a product of this program, a successful result. The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided the education that has shaped me into being the intelligent, ambitious, person that is in front of you now. The results of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program are certainly life-changing. Now being a young adult, taking on my own responsibilities, I have certainly been greatly influenced by this program. I can look back and credit this program for my success.

"It's not just what this program does academically, but it is how it impacts an individual's life through education"

Thank you.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Holassie.

Ms. Alvarez, we will recognize you for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF LESLY ALVAREZ

Ms. ALVAREZ. Hi, Chairman Gowdy. Hello, Ranking Member Davis and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to tell my story today.

My name is Lesly Alvarez. I am an eighth grade Opportunity Scholarship student. I live at home with my mother, father, and brother. At home, we speak Spanish and English. English is my second language; I learned it while attending Sacred Heart School. Both languages are taught at Sacred Heart because it is a bilingual school. In fact, it is the only bilingual Catholic school in all of D.C.

Sacred Heart is a very special and unique place. My classmates and I represent a lot of different countries, for example: El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Cameroon, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Vietnam. Also, we share different religious backgrounds. There are Catholic and Buddhist students and there are Protestant students like me. The common thread between us all is that we are all learning to be responsible citizens of our school community and the greater community. My teachers are very proud of me for testifying on behalf of our school community today.

I am very involved in my school. A minimum of 20 hours of community service is needed in order to graduate eighth grade. I only have 2 hours left. My favorite subject in school is Language Arts. I love it so much because there is reading involved. I am able to grasp the material quickly and connect stories to my life.

I am definitely planning on attending college in my future. I am sure that I want to make something out of my life and be successful. I am interested in studying law. I think I would be a good lawyer because I am a persuasive arguer and fight for what I believe in. The main reason why I find interest in law is because I like defending people and I stand up for justice.

One of my favorite books is *En Busca de Milagros*. In English this translates as "In Search of Miracles." I am reading this book right now in my Spanish class. It is so powerful and has changed the way I looked at my life and my future.

I connect with the main character, Milly, short for Milagros, in a couple of ways. The first way is that we are both searching for something. Being an adopted child, Milly is searching for knowledge of her past. Being an Opportunity Scholar, I am searching for knowledge for my future. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a miracle for me and hundreds of other students like me. Milly wants to know where she comes from. I want to know where I am going. With my scholarship, I know I will go far.

Milly and I have one more thing in common: we are young and a lot of people tell us that we are too young to overcome the obstacles set in front of us. Milly's successful story showed me that I should just keep working to get through the obstacles. I know I cannot change the minds of the adults who doubt the value of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. But, like Milly, I know that I need to work hard every day to overcome my obstacles and dem-

onstrate the value of my scholarship so that more kids like me can receive it too.

There are a couple of ways that Milly and I are different. First, Milly finds only two adults who help support her on her journey. I have more than two people helping me. I have my parents and teachers. I know that Cardinal Wuerl is supportive of me and there are many Members of Congress, like Speaker Boehner and Senator Lieberman, who support me in this program.

The second way we are different is that it took Milly until the middle of her story to learn she could not control the world around her and that she just needed to take control of her actions and be really dedicated to get her miracle. In my case, I feel like I am still in the beginning of my life story. I still have a lot of years of education ahead of me in order to achieve my dreams. But, unlike Milly, I will not wait to take control of my actions until later. I am taking control today by testifying.

Milly's miracle comes to her because eventually her work leads her to learn about her past. The miracle that I am searching for today is that the Opportunity Scholarship Program be reauthorized. I know other kids will enjoy their scholarship as much as I have.

My name is Lesly Alvarez and I am en busca de un milagro. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Alvarez follows:]

TESTIMONY OF LESLY ALVAREZ
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia,
Census and the National Archives
MARCH 1, 2011

Hello, Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis and Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to tell my story today.

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There are a couple of ways that Milly and I are different. First, Milly finds only two adults who help support her on her journey. I have more than two people helping me. I have my parents and teachers. I know that Cardinal Wuerl is supportive of me and there are many members of Congress, like Speaker Boehner and Senator Lieberman, who support me in this program.

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My name is Lesly Alvarez and I am en busca de un milagro.
Thank you.

Lesly Alvarez

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Ms. Alvarez.

We will recognize Ms. Jackson for her 5 minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF SHEILA JACKSON

Ms. JACKSON. Chairman Gowdy, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I am a single parent of two. I have a 15-year-old daughter who is and has been a recipient of the Opportunity Scholarship for 6 years.

I was educated in the south and experienced racism firsthand. I attended segregated schools until I began high school. I prayed that when I became a mother my child or children would never have to experience racism on the level I did.

As a young girl, I remember waking in the middle of the night to screaming neighbors because a cross was burning on their lawn. I also have memories of being told that I could not use the restroom in public buildings while out shopping with my mother because I was not the appropriate skin color; watching the Ku Klux Klan parading in our neighborhood just because they could. The list goes on. But, in spite of all the racial negativity surrounding me, I vowed that I would not let it hamper my growth and that, when I had children, I would provide the best I could and that they would have the best education possible.

In spite of all my efforts, my daughter now faces another form of segregation: to segregate her from attending a school of my choice and that is best suited for her just because some politicians feel that my child and many others who are currently recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship do not deserve the quality education their children receive. Why? That's a question we parents would all like an answer to. I am disabled and I live on a fixed income. If this program is not reauthorized, it would be impossible for me to pay tuition to the private Christian school my daughter currently attends. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been the difference to her having to attend schools that are not safe and are still underperforming to her attending a school that meets her needs and where I know she is safe. My daughter attended D.C. public schools through fourth grade. I was not pleased with the overcrowded classrooms, teachers having to share teacher aides, purchase school supplies with their own money, children so unruly the police had to be called because they were a threat to the rest of the student body.

During her fourth grade year I had taken as much as I could. She was struggling in math and her teacher was not willing to do anything outside of her plan to help my daughter. We went back and forth, with her teacher accusing me of trying to run classroom. She blatantly told me that if my daughter did not get it, then she was sorry. I agreed with her that she was sorry if she was not willing to do what she was there for, to educate the students in her charge. I was determined that I would not allow this school system to fail my child, and I knew that if she continued in the D.C. public school system that would surely be the case. The school she attended was an underperforming school, as were most of the schools

in my ward. I requested a meeting with the principal and that meeting was granted.

In attendance were her teacher, the principal and myself. After hearing from her teacher and myself, he was in agreement with me that her teacher was not doing enough to help my daughter. I learned about tutoring options for low income families under the No Child Left Behind Program. I applied for my daughter and she was accepted.

After an assessment of her by the tutor, it was discovered that she was intimidated by math. Ms. Johns her tutor, who is currently a professor at the University of Oklahoma, worked with my daughter through the remainder of the school year. There was a tremendous improvement in her math grades.

That was her last year in the D.C. public school system. During that year, I learned about and applied for the Opportunity Scholarship and Shawnee was accepted. She is now a sophomore in high school attending The Preparatory School of D.C., an honor roll student, and making plans for college.

Not only has the Opportunity Scholarship provided me a choice for my daughter, but also for thousands of other parents. I stand today asking that the Opportunity Scholarship Program be reauthorized and be opened to new students as well.

My motto is simple "Walk Good and Journey Safe," that our children will continue to be afforded the opportunity to have a good walk through their education and all their educational journeys be safe. Thank You.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Jackson follows:]

TESTIMONY OF SHEILA D. JACKSON

**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the
National Archives**

MARCH 1, 2011

Chairman Gowdy and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I am a single parent of two. I have a fifteen year old daughter who is and has been a recipient of the Opportunity Scholarship for six years.

I was educated in the south and experienced racism firsthand. I attended segregated schools until I began high school. I prayed that when I became a mother my child/ren would never have to experience racism on the level I did.

As a young girl I remember waking up in the middle of the night to screaming neighbors because a cross was burning on their lawn. I also have memories of being told I could not use the restroom in public buildings while out shopping with my mother because I was not the appropriate skin color, watching the Klu Klux Klan parading in our neighborhood just because they could. The list goes on. But

in spite of all the racial negativity surrounding me I vowed that I would not let it hamper my growth and that when I had children I would provide the best that I could and that they would have the best education possible.

In spite of all my efforts my daughter now faces another form of segregation to segregate her from attending a school of my choice and that is best suited for her just because some politicians feel that my child and many others who are currently recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship do not deserve the quality education their children receive. Why? That's a question we parents would all like an answer to. I am disabled and live on a fixed income. If this program is not reauthorized it would be impossible for me to pay tuition to the private Christian school my daughter currently attends. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been the difference to her having to attend schools that are not safe and are still underperforming to her now attending a school that meets her needs and where I know she is safe. My daughter attended DC Public Schools through fourth grade. I was not pleased with the overcrowded classrooms, teachers having to share teacher aides, purchase school supplies with their own money, children so unruly the police had to be called because they were a threat to the rest of the student body

During her fourth grade year I had taken as much as I could. Shawnee was struggling in math and her teacher was not willing to do anything outside of her plan to help my daughter. We went back and forth, with her teacher accusing me

of trying to run classroom. She blatantly told me that if my daughter did not get it than she was sorry. I agreed with her that she was sorry if she was not willing to do what she was there for to educate the students in her charge. I was determined that I would not allow this school system to fail my child and I knew that if she continued in the DC Public School System that would surely be the case. The school she attended was an underperforming school as were most of the schools in my ward. I requested a meeting with the principle and that meeting was granted.

In attendance were her teacher, the principle and myself. After hearing from her teacher and myself he was in agreement with me that her teacher was not doing enough to help my daughter. I learned about tutoring options for low income families under the No Child Left Behind Program, I applied for my daughter and she was accepted.

After an assessment of her by the tutor it was discovered that she was intimidated by math. Ms. Johns her tutor who is currently a Professor at the University of Oklahoma, worked with my daughter through the remainder of the school year. There was a tremendous improvement in her math grades.

That was her last year in the DC Public School System. During that year I learned about and applied for the Opportunity Scholarship and Shawnee was accepted. She is now a sophomore in high school attending the The Preparatory School of DC, an honor roll student and making plans for college.

Not only has the OSP provided me a choice for my daughter, but also for thousands of other parents. I stand today asking that the Opportunity Scholarship Program be reauthorized and be opened to new students as well.

My motto is simple “Walk Good and Journey Safe”, that our children will continue to be afforded the opportunity to have a good walk through their education and all their educational journeys be safe.

Thank You

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Ms. Jackson.

The Chair will recognize Ms. Bennett for her 5 minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF LATASHA BENNETT

Ms. BENNETT. Good morning, Chairman Gowdy and members of the committee and supporters. Thank you for allowing me to share my family's story regarding the need to continue the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and for it to be reauthorized.

My name is LaTasha Bennett. I am a 39-year-old single parent of two very intelligent children. My son Nico Thomas, here today, is 9 years old and attends Naylor Road Private School, where he is in the fourth grade and he is excelling. My daughter Nia Thomas is 6 years old and she also attends Naylor Road, thanks to generous private donations which we have truly been blessed to receive. Without these donations, I do not know where my daughter would be going to school. I am currently unemployed due to a disability. I worked from the age of 14 until the year 2000, when I became disabled. Because of the inability for me to work, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for myself and my son and our family.

Nico is thriving academically in his school and loving it. The students in Nico's class get more hands-on from the teacher because there are only nine students in his class. Students are given so much more attention and they learn twice as much in their class. I don't want to see my son's dreams of becoming a doctor washed down the drain because he is forced to attend a school that does not meet his needs.

I applied for the scholarship for Nia so she could attend Naylor Road School for the 2009–10 school year. I had received a letter of authorization granting Nia a scholarship and I was so elated. Then, a month or two later, a retraction letter came. It was like a nightmare. I was appalled. I felt a bit of injustice not only to my daughter, but to all of the other children as well. I felt like the system had failed my baby before she had been given a chance to even begin her dreams. I was totally devastated and angry that my child was denied an opportunity to attend the school along with her brother, a school where she would be safe and get a quality education. Why shouldn't my child be given the same opportunity as your children to get the best education possible? Is my child not worthy of getting what so many of our ancestors fought for years ago?

My daughter has dreams of being a famous dancer and singer, and I motivate her dreams because as long as she has a dream, there is a chance for a good future. I want Nia to have the same opportunity to excel well as her brother. In the same way that she has big dreams to excel, I want that also for other students. Nia is so looking forward to going to college in the future. She continues to ask me, "Mom, will I go to my school with my brother next year?" I use to answer her and tell her yes. Now I don't know what will I tell her. I know that I cannot count on private donations to send her to Naylor Road for the remainder of her time in school. But I look at my child and see she is so happy that I can't bring myself to express doubt. I believe you, Chairman Gowdy, and the

members of this committee know how it feels when your child is so happy that their little face lights up and you can't bring yourself to cause that light to go out. We are looking to those of you who have power to continue this program and assure that our children have the opportunity to get the type of education they deserve.

Without the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, I pray daily that I will have peace of mind to know, because I don't know where I will truly send my daughter to school. I know for certain it will not be any schools in my area. I have seen what happens to the children in neighborhood that fall through the cracks. I lost my nephew to a neighborhood school. I will not lose my children, when they are so bright and willing to learn and be productive citizens. Please allow my children to continue this opportunity through the Opportunity Scholarship Program to have a bright and better future by continuing this program.

Education is the No. 1 priority, besides God, in my household, and by reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, so many parents and children like myself will have hope for a better future. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Bennett follows:]

TESTIMONY OF LATASHA BENNETT**House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census
and the National Archives****MARCH 1, 2011**

Chairman Gowdy and Members of the Committee: thank you for allowing me to share my family's story regarding the need for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program to be reauthorized.

My name is LaTasha Bennett; I am a thirty-nine year old, single mother of two very intelligent children. My son Nico Thomas is nine years old and attends Naylor Road Private School, where he is in the fourth grade and where he is excelling. My daughter Nia Thomas is six years old and she also attends Naylor Road, thanks to generous private donations which we have truly been blessed to receive. Without these donations, I do not know where my daughter would be going to school. I am currently unemployed due to a disability. I worked from the age of 14 until I became disabled in 2000. Because of my inability to work, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for my son and our family

Nico is thriving academically in his school and loving it. The students in Nico's class get more hands-on teaching from the teacher because there are only nine students in his class. Students are given so much more attention and they learn twice as much in their classes. I don't want to see my son's dreams of becoming a doctor washed down the drain because he is forced to attend a school that does not meet his needs.

I applied for a scholarship for Nia so she could attend Naylor Road School for the 2009-10 school year. I had received a letter of approval granting Nia a scholarship and I was so elated. Then about a month or two later, a retraction letter came. It was like a nightmare. I teach my children to live by the law, but I felt like the system had failed my

baby before she even got a chance to begin her dreams. I was totally devastated and angry that my child was denied an opportunity to attend, along with her brother, a school where she would be safe and get a quality education. Why shouldn't my child be given the same opportunity as your children to get the best education possible? Is my child not worthy of getting what so many of our ancestors fought for years ago?

My daughter has dreams of being a famous dancer and singer, and I want to motivate her dreams because as long as she has a dream there is a chance for a better future. I want Nia to have the opportunity to excel as well as her brother. Nia is so looking forward to going to college in the future and she continues to ask me "Mom, will I go to my school with my brother next year?" I use to answer her and tell her "yes". Now I don't know what to tell her. I know that I cannot count on private donations to send Nia to Naylor Road for the remainder of her time in school. But when you look at your child, and see she is so happy, you can't bring yourself to express doubt. I believe you, Chairman Gowdy, and the members of this committee know how it feels when your child is so happy their little face lights up and you can't bring yourself to cause that light to go out. We are looking to those who have the power to do so to continue this program and assure that our children have the opportunity to get the type of education they deserve.

Without the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, I do not have the peace of mind to know, truly, where I will send my daughter to school. I know for certain it will not be any schools in my area. I have seen what happens to children in my neighborhood when they fall through the cracks. I saw my nephew die. I will not lose my babies when they are so bright and willing to learn and be productive citizens. Please allow my children the opportunity to have a bright and better future by continuing this program.

Education is the #1 priority in my household and by reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, so many parents, like me, will have **HOPE** for our children to succeed. Please allow this program to continue for as long as possible; for as many as possible. . Our children's future depends on this wonderful opportunity. They

have bright goals for their future, so please allow them this chance to make them all come true.

We sincerely appreciate your commitment to our children's education. **Our children are the future**, and without the proper education what type of future will they have? I thank you and so do Nico and Nia in advance, because we know that all of you know that education is the key to their success and we believe you will make the right decision.

Thank you.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Ms. Bennett.

I will recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions, and I want to start by saying what I am sure most of the people in the room know, but it may bear amplification, which is the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program does not take one red cent from the D.C. public school system; and to argue otherwise is disingenuous at best. This is not an argument about whether or not we are going to fund all three layers of the D.C. school system; it is about whether we are going to give the same choice to poor folk that rich folk have.

So against that backdrop, let me ask Mr. Holassie and Ms. Alvarez to do what is sometimes hard even for adults to do, which is imagine circumstances are different. I want you to imagine if there were no D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. Do you have friends whose lives have taken a different path because they didn't have the same opportunities you did? We will start with you, Mr. Holassie, then we will go to you, Ms. Alvarez.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, absolutely. Some of my friends that actually went back into the public school system completely change. Some of them are on the street; some of them don't really know what colleges they are going to. Some haven't even applied to college. So it is a big difference.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Alvarez.

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes. I had some friends that used to go to Sacred Heart with me, but now they attend public school, and they just don't know what to do. Some haven't even applied to high school. So it is just sad.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Bennett, if I understood your testimony correctly, it was that if you were persons of means, if money were not an issue in life, you would choose to go to the private schools that your children are going to. Is that correct?

Ms. JACKSON. That is correct for me, sir. I firmly believe that it should be a choice of where I send my daughter to school, where I feel it is safe for her, where her educational needs are met. And right now, where she is, I feel that everything she needs is met there; she is safe. I don't worry about her during the day, whether a fight is going to break out or whether the police will have to be called. I am very comfortable with the environment that she is in.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Bennett.

Ms. BENNETT. Likewise. I also am, as you asked, if it had not been for the funding, I am totally approved and I am appreciated of this school that I chose, that I had the opportunity to choose for my children, for one, because of the safety, because of the teachers' commitments to teach the children, and the grades that my children are getting. I brought today, for an example, Nia, being she had donations, made all As in the first grade and is writing in cursive, which I know we started like in third grade. And if I had the funds, I would pay for a better education for my child, but I don't.

Mr. GOWDY. So the only reason that Ms. Jackson and Ms. Bennett are here, you have already made the choice in your mind. If you were people of means, you wouldn't have to come before a congressional committee and ask for this program.

Ms. BENNETT. Not at all.

Mr. GOWDY. Can you fashion any reason why poor folk or folk who are not wealthy enough to attend private school on their own should have fewer choices than rich folk?

Ms. BENNETT. I don't see any reason why not, because I think that our children should be able to get the same education and allowed the same education, be it that we are poor or not. We just can't afford to give our children that education. And if most people empathize that are wealthier and put themselves in our shoes, I believe that they would think differently to reauthorize this program.

Mr. GOWDY. Mr. Holassie, you are pleased with your educational experience?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I am.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Alvarez, you are pleased with your educational experience?

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes, I am.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Jackson, you are pleased with your children's educational experience?

Ms. JACKSON. Yes, I am, sir.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Bennett, you are pleased with your children's educational experience?

Ms. BENNETT. I am pleased with Nico. I ask and pray that you all reauthorize because I can't guarantee donations for Nia's continued. But I am pleased that both of them are on the honor roll.

Mr. GOWDY. You are pleased with the environment from a safety and security and environment conducive of learning? You are pleased with that aspect of your school?

Ms. BENNETT. I am pleased with every aspect of the school that we chose.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Jackson.

Ms. JACKSON. Yes, I am, sir. I am pleased as well that the school she currently attends has a family atmosphere. They not only care about the education of the students, but they are helping to groom those boys and girls into young men and women, and I am very pleased with that.

Mr. GOWDY. Ms. Alvarez, you are pleased?

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes, I am. I feel safe in my school.

Mr. GOWDY. Mr. Holassie, you are pleased?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I am, as my principal, Dr. Stofa, enforces every day to have a safe environment for us all.

Mr. GOWDY. The Chair would recognize the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Let me thank all four of you for your tremendous comments and statements. I seriously appreciate them.

Ms. Jackson and Ms. Bennett, both of you indicated that there is a serious difference between the schools that your children currently attend and the schools that they attended earlier. Could you share with us what those differences are?

Ms. JACKSON. Yes, Mr. Davis. The last school my daughter attended in the D.C. public school system was McGogney Elementary School, which is in Ward 8, where we were living at the time. We actually lived next door to the school, so I had a full view of the outside activity, not knowing what was going on on the inside. Being disabled, I was at home a big portion of the day and often

would see police cars pulling into the parking lot, which would give me great fear because I did not know what was going on with the student body inside. And this happened on a daily basis.

The school that she is currently attending and the school that she previously attended before her current school were both private Christian schools. When I leave her or when she leaves me in the morning and she steps into the school, I don't worry. I know that her educational needs are going to be met; I know that she is going to be safe. I know that if anything happens, that I will be contacted to know that maybe she has fallen and had an accident. I didn't get that in the D.C. public school system. She would come home on numerous days saying that someone had taken something from her. She was afraid to say anything to the student for fear of being beaten up. So there is a big difference in the education she has had over the past 6 years and the first 4 years of her education in the D.C. public school system.

Mr. DAVIS. Ms. Bennett.

Ms. BENNETT. OK, I can say Nico only had 1 year experience in public schools, and that 1 year he went to Clark Elementary, which was in Ward 4, which we had lived at that moment. And I was pregnant with my daughter. I was a high-risk pregnancy; therefore, I was unable to work. And I was one of those apron string moms and I frequently went up to Nico's school, which he was in pre-K, and I can honestly say every entrance to the school, be it the side entrance, because his class was accessible to the outside, their playground, the doors were open. I would go through just to see.

And one time I even drove up to the school and parked on the side, and the students were actually on the playground by themselves just because a door was open to their classroom. And after that I had several questions for the teachers why Nico wasn't learning more than what he had learned at home. They couldn't give me any answers, and I wanted more for my child and I took him out of the public school.

Mr. DAVIS. Let me ask you are the same children going to the same schools? Are the children that your—

Ms. BENNETT. My two children?

Mr. DAVIS. Yes.

Ms. BENNETT. Yes. They both attend Naylor Road. Only Nia does through donations that I won't be able to—

Mr. DAVIS. Are any of the students who attended their prior school also attending this school?

Ms. BENNETT. Not to my knowledge.

Mr. DAVIS. Ms. Jackson, do you know if any of the same children are attending with your child?

Ms. JACKSON. Children from D.C. public schools?

Mr. DAVIS. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON. No, there aren't.

Mr. DAVIS. And so the schools that your children currently attend, are they much smaller?

Ms. BENNETT. Smaller classes, yes.

Ms. JACKSON. Yes.

Mr. DAVIS. Are the students perhaps more selective?

Ms. BENNETT. I notice that the students—excuse me. I notice that the students are very intelligent from the teaching which even

my son receives. I notice that, because I did volunteer up at their school several times, that a lot of the students did come from public schools, and it is the parents that chose to take advantage of the opportunity. And the classes are smaller, so there is more hands-on teaching.

Mr. DAVIS. And you indicated that these are both Christian schools, charter Christian?

Ms. BENNETT. My son and Nia go to a private school, it is not religious-based.

Mr. DAVIS. None of them are charters, they are all private?

Ms. BENNETT. To my knowledge.

Ms. JACKSON. Yes. Their school is a private school.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Ms. JACKSON. You are welcome.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Davis.

The Chair would recognize the gentleman from Arizona, Dr. Gosar.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you.

I also come from a State that is struggling with education. I am also from rural America, from a town of 1,000. That is where I got my education. And I saw what it takes as a community to educate. My question to you, Ms. Bennett and Ms. Jackson, is why would you find it a problem not to have a choice and able to dictating where your child goes to school? Do you see a problem?

Ms. BENNETT. I see a problem with not having a choice, because that takes away, first of all, my own liberty that we are supposed to have to choose, and it is a problem to me to not have that choice to choose, because I want what is best for my child, just like other people choose to send their children where they choose to. It is just that I am not financially fit to pay for what I choose, so that is a problem for me.

Dr. GOSAR. Ms. Jackson.

Ms. JACKSON. I agree in whole with Ms. Bennett. I want the choice to have my child have a quality education, just as wealthy Americans make the choices to send their children to private schools that they know are safe, where they are going to receive a quality education. I feel my daughter deserves nothing less, and I want to continue to have that choice, although I am also not financially able to make those payments to a private school. But I would like to continue to have the choice to send my daughter to a school that works for her.

Dr. GOSAR. Let me continue. Would you look at the public education system and say it is a success as it currently is right now?

Ms. BENNETT. Honestly, I would say no. Just to be brief, I have nephews and a niece that goes to the local school in my area, and I frequently go with my sister to the school because they are calling almost twice a week or three times a week because of incidents that are happening at the school; either somebody is trying to beat up my nephew or beat up my niece. They are twins. And this is a D.C. public school.

And I had almost got frustrated with not knowing about the Opportunity Scholarship Program continuing that I had almost applied to that school, and I sat in there for 30 minutes, and after seeing what was going on I honestly left out and left the papers

on the table, and I said no matter what, if they didn't reauthorize this program, I would home-teach my daughter other than have her in an environment that is not safe and that—I mean, I saw teachers and things that you wouldn't even believe happening. And this isn't the first time.

Dr. GOSAR. Ms. Jackson.

Ms. JACKSON. I am just really passionate about this and I think that the D.C. public school system is not a bad school system, but it needs great improvement, and I believe that at this time it would not satisfy me or satisfy the needs of my daughter for her to be in the D.C. public school system. As Mr. Holassie stated, the school system didn't get that way overnight, and it is not going to be fixed overnight; so it is going to take a while to get it back to where it should be. I believe that the school system could be a great school system if all the efforts are put forth and things are done to make it better. But right now, no, I don't think it is the school system that—well, I know it is not the school system that I would want my child in at this time.

Dr. GOSAR. One last point. It seems to me that on education there has to be the family input, an important segment that we have never really tried to involve in the public school district. And with my education everything is results based as a doctor. Now, when we look at positive results, could you see any way, as a parent, the opportunity for choice gives you the opportunity for success in the educational model?

Ms. JACKSON. I believe so. I believe that because of the disarray that the D.C. public school system is in and the choice that I have chosen and the choice that I have been able to take has been a difference in her quality of education, her grades. Her grades have greatly improved in the 6-years that she has been out of the D.C. public school system, and I just know that because of this, that is why her grades are there, where she attends school. I know in my heart, in my soul that because she was out of the D.C. public school system, that these grades that she is making, the career choices that she is thinking about are because of the choice of her being in a school that cares about what she learns and where she goes in her future.

Ms. BENNETT. And I agree with Ms. Jackson. It is evident by the report cards that I have here that my children are excelling in the school that I chose for them to go to, and I was very vigorously searching when I was choosing. And if they had not had the opportunity or I had not had the opportunity to choose, I don't believe they would be making these same grades and as motivated to be what they want they want to be in the future.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Dr. Gosar.

The Chair would recognize the gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Representative Holmes Norton.

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

I want to congratulate the achievements of my young constituents, and clearly against the odds. Very proud of you. And I want to congratulate the parents, because you are doing what parents are supposed to be doing. The most important factor in student achievement is passion of the parents for that achievement, and I know that well.

Ms. Jackson, I graduated from segregated schools in the District of Columbia. I went to Bruce Monroe Elementary School, I went to Banneker, where there was a junior high school, and I am a proud graduate of Dunbar High School. Schools then were perhaps better. There was a large population here in the District of Columbia. I love the D.C. public schools; they are doing much better. But you will never find that this Congresswoman is an apologist for anything that offers less than quality education to our children.

Mr. Holassie, I am proud that you are about to graduate. I hope you know about DCTAG.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I do.

Ms. NORTON. All right. DCTAG is the 100 percent funded Federal program that allows our youngsters to go to any public college anywhere in the United States, and that program has doubled college attendance here. And, Mr. Holassie, whether you choose a public or private school, anybody that gets you is going to get a lot of quality.

I am going to use the remainder of my time simply to put on the record what the record is for this program, and I appreciate the time that was given me in my opening remarks.

I was speaking about Speaker Gingrich, who approached me about school vouchers, and I told him of public opposition to vouchers in the city but not to public charter schools, as demonstrated by fledgling charter school law in the District that had attracted only a few charters. The result was Public Law 104-134, which included the School Reform Act of 1995, passed here in the Congress, that has produced what amounts to a large-scale, robust alternative public school system that has become a model for the Nation, with almost half of our children in attendance. The long waiting lists of our public charter schools are the best evidence of their quality and their embrace by our parents and residents at the school's own home rule choice.

Our public charter schools are aware both of the need and the demand. Why then set up a congressionally sponsored private school program for the city? Why, when ours is the only big city with both rapidly improving public schools and a model alternative public charter school system; why, when the city is one of the few jurisdictions in the Nation that has no barriers to public school alternatives; why isn't the District of Columbia being rewarded with funding to continue to build the city's public charter schools and to respond to the waiting lists of parents that can't get in, can't enroll their students? The answer is power; the same congressional power that stripped the city of its vote on the first day of the session, that also seeks to reimpose anti-democratic amendments on the city in the pending appropriation bills. It is power that this power respected D.C. democracy.

We appreciate congressional interest in our children. We ask only for congressional respect for the people of the District of Columbia who have built their own alternative to our public schools. Any new funding for education in the District should reinforce the hard work of our own parents and residents who have shown the Nation that they know how to build a popular alternative public school system with a dazzling variety of public character schools, from the nationally resounded Kipp Schools to Hospitality High, from the Latin

Charter School to the Seed Residential Charter School. D.C. residents know what to do without the benefit of congressional paternalism, instruction, or intervention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you.

The Chair would recognize the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Walsh.

Mr. WALSH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, panel, for coming today. I want you all to do me a big favor: put a big smile on your faces. [Laughter.]

This should be such a happy, happy hearing; and, believe me, I have sat in a number of hearings that are not happy. You all are a huge success story. You all are, especially you two right there, you are the future. You are the future. You are the face of education in this country.

I come from Illinois. In Illinois, we have a new mayor of Chicago, Rahm Immanuel. And I think a couple days ago Mr. Immanuel was asked where is he going to send his kids to school now that he is moving back to Chicago, and I believe his answers—and I don't want to get it wrong—was I don't know, it could be public, could be private, could be religious, could be charter, but that is going to be the decision my wife and I make, and I would just ask that you respect that decision. How refreshing.

I want you to do something that might be terribly—

[Applause.]

Mr. WALSH. Yes, clap. Do something that the four of you might not want to do: pretend you are politicians for a minute. Put on your political hats. Try to give me short answers. Politicians don't give short answers. Do your best.

Why do you think it is that there are people in this country—think like a politician—that don't want you to have this choice? Be brief. Think like a politician. Why is it that people don't want to give you that choice? Let's start here.

Mr. HOLASSIE. What I feel is how could you oppose of such program as—

Mr. WALSH. No, no, Mr. Holassie. With all due respect, that is not what I asked.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Oh.

Mr. WALSH. But you know what? You are going to make a good politician, because you didn't answer the question. [Laughter.]

I want a straight, direct answer out of you. Why do you think it is that there are people who don't want you to have this choice? Simple, why?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Other priorities.

Mr. WALSH. What? Give me one priority that might come before, before your parents having that choice.

Mr. HOLASSIE. It can be political decisions.

Mr. WALSH. Political.

Ms. Alvarez, why do you think there are some people that don't want your parents to have a choice.

Ms. ALVAREZ. I really don't understand why they wouldn't want us to have the choice or my parents to have the choice. I don't understand. It is just not a right choice to make to not want our parents to put us in a good school.

Mr. WALSH. Ms. Jackson, be political for me. Come on. Why do you think it is there are people that do not want you to have that choice, this choice? Come on.

Ms. JACKSON. Honestly speaking, sir, I believe they don't even know why, truly, they don't want our children to have the same valued and quality education as their children do. It is all politics. And if you get right down to it, it stems from money.

Mr. WALSH. Maybe I have asked a bad question. If you had to guess, Ms. Bennett, you can start, who doesn't want you to have that choice? Who do you think it is that doesn't want you to have this choice?

Ms. BENNETT. To me, it is probably the NEA.

Mr. WALSH. The NEA is who?

Ms. BENNETT. The National Education Association.

Mr. WALSH. The teachers unions.

Ms. BENNETT. And it is probably the public schools, of course, the public school and private school sector; and it is the opposers that know that this program works.

Mr. WALSH. All right, now this is getting a little fun. Now, Ms. Bennett, play a game with me. Take the teachers unions.

Ms. BENNETT. OK.

Mr. WALSH. Just think off the top of your head. Why would they not want parents to ultimate have choice?

Ms. BENNETT. Because they would choose what is better for their kids.

Mr. WALSH. And if they did that, what might happen?

Ms. BENNETT. They would lose a lot of their jobs because they will take them and put them to the private schools and take them out of the public schools.

Mr. WALSH. We are getting somewhere. [Laughter and applause.]

Oh, and I am running out of time.

If this program succeeds, Ms. Alvarez, if the D.C. Scholarship Program succeeds, what will that show people?

Ms. ALVAREZ. It will show people that everybody, the kids have a future and have something to look forward to.

Mr. WALSH. Mr. Holassie, who would be afraid of the fact that the program might succeed?

Mr. WALSH. People who are in opposition of this program.

Mr. WALSH. And our ranking member very eloquently, I thought, said that this is an issue all about power, and it is about power. I think the nuance that I would add is that when it comes to educating our kids, who should have that power. Pretty simple question, right? When it comes to educating our kids, should it be us up here? Should it be the teachers? Should it be the administrators? Should it be the Governor? Who should have the power, the power when it comes to deciding where a child goes to school? This should be a one-word answer. Ms. Bennett.

Ms. BENNETT. The parents.

Mr. WALSH. Ms. Jackson.

Ms. JACKSON. I agree.

Mr. WALSH. Ms. Alvarez, who should have that power?

Ms. ALVAREZ. I agree with the parents.

Mr. WALSH. You are not going to dissent, are you, Mr. Holassie? [Laughter.]

He wouldn't dare.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Parents.

Mr. WALSH. Thank you. Thank you all four for coming. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Walsh.

[Applause.]

Mr. GOWDY. The Chair would recognize the ranking member of the full committee, the distinguished member from Maryland, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Thank you very much.

As I listen to the witnesses, I am very impressed and I want to thank all of you for being here. And I don't want us to be confused by what is happening here today. I think it is a disservice to a person like Ms. Holmes Norton for anybody to even remotely imply, and for me and for others, that we don't want people to have choice. The only way that I am here today, as a son of two former sharecroppers with less than a sixth grade education, is because of an education. So we get that.

We also get that this week \$890 million from the general education budget is going to be slashed. That is real. And I think the thing that we confuse is this: Mr. Holassie and Ms. Alvarez, we want every single child to have the opportunity that you have, every one. We want all 74,000 in D.C. to have that. I want them in my community. I live in the inner city of Baltimore. I head a school right. Right now I am the president of a public school. My daughter went to charter school and I was on the board of that charter school for 4 years. That charter school started out 10 years ago and now it is one of the best schools in the entire city. I sit on the board of the Kipp School. I know what can be done when we put our heads together to help children achieve.

So let's not be confused. It is not a question of whether folk don't want people to have choices. When it came to my daughter going to school, I made sure she got a good education. And I applaud you, Ms. Bennett, and I applaud you, Ms. Jackson, because we have to be the No. 1 advocates for our children. And I have said it many times: our children only have one chance. This is their turn. This is their turn to get an education. So, I mean, as much as I appreciate the scholarship program, I want it for every kid.

Mr. Holassie, when you were asked the question about what happened to some of your friends who may have gone into the public schools, stayed in the public schools, I know what you are talking about. I live in the inner city. I see every day what happens. And you are right, you want a safe environment. And you can bet your bottom dollar that most Members of Congress, their kids go to school in a safe environment. You can bet your bottom dollar that they do have the choices.

Well, I think that what we should want, all of us, before we start cutting \$890 million from the education budget, we need to be concentrating on how do we make sure that every single child is properly educated. The greatest threat to our national security in this country is our failure to properly educate every single child, every one of them. And when we fail to do that, then we have the situation where we have young men in Baltimore prisons with less than

a sixth grade reading level. They look just as sharp and good as you do, sitting behind some bars with a hat turned backward and pants hanging down. And that is why I applaud you and that is why you all are such an inspiration to me and to others to fight for opportunity.

But sadly, in our country, not everybody has all those choices, and I am just wondering. You know, I look at the charter schools and D.C. has made some tremendous strides. And I am not saying that those strides are being made fast enough. But I just want to make sure that we don't lose sight of the—somebody asked the question, said are any of the same kids from the private school—I think it was Mr. Davis, from the public school now going to the private school, and the answer was no. And the fact is that for every one of those children that get a chance to go these private schools, there are probably I don't know how many, but hundreds of thousands, I guess, maybe hundreds, who don't get that chance.

So if we are going to do anything, we need to be working together to make sure that every child has those opportunities so that every one can become all that God meant for them to be.

I yield back.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Cummings.

The Chair would recognize the distinguished gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. McHenry.

Mr. MCHENRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you and congratulations on your first hearing as a subcommittee chair.

Thank you all for your testimony. I have been able to watch part of it on TV and I was in for part of the remainder.

Mr. Holassie.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY. You are a senior?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I am.

Mr. MCHENRY. Where are you going to college?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Well, I am waiting for decision letters to be mailed back, so—

Mr. MCHENRY. Where did you apply to?

Mr. HOLASSIE. I applied to University of Central Florida, University of South Florida, University of Miami, Florida Atlantic University, Florida Institute of Technology—[laughter.]

A lot of Florida schools. [Laughter.]

Mr. MCHENRY. Was it because of Snowmageddon? Was it because of all the snow we had last year?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Somewhat. I just love the environment.

Mr. MCHENRY. Well, that is great. So how many colleges did you apply to?

Mr. HOLASSIE. About six or seven. Bethune-Cookman is another one I am applying to.

Mr. MCHENRY. OK.

Ms. Alvarez.

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY. Where do you want to go to college? I know it is a little early, but I bet you know a couple places.

Ms. ALVAREZ. I know Mount St. Mary's and, like he said, FIU, Florida International. That is a nice school.

Mr. MCHENRY. Oh, excellent. Excellent. OK.

So, Mr. Holassie, so the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship, what has it meant to you? Just sum it up for us.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Life-changing experience. I wouldn't be the person that I am right here before you all if it wasn't for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Mr. MCHENRY. Life-changing?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes. It changed me as an individual, as a person.

Mr. MCHENRY. Why? Why? Why did it change you? It is just money. How does this actually change your life?

Mr. HOLASSIE. As I stated in my testimony, it is not just what this program does academically, but it is how it impacts an individual through education. And that is what it has done for me.

Mr. MCHENRY. OK.

Ms. Alvarez, you mentioned that you had parental involvement that actually made this happen.

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY. Are there other folks in your family that have been involved in your life and encouraged you?

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes, all of my family; my grandparents, my uncles, my aunts. All of my family have always been encouraging me to go for my future and make the best out of it.

Mr. MCHENRY. Mr. Holassie, is that your same experience, others in your family encouraging you?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes. Others in my family certainly encouraged me.

Mr. MCHENRY. OK, OK. Well, it is interesting because—

So, Mr. Holassie, when you came in to sixth grade, you said you had to repeat sixth grade.

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I had to because the public school system basically failed me. I wasn't successful in the public school system.

Mr. MCHENRY. Are you now prepared to go to college?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes, I am.

Mr. MCHENRY. All right.

Ms. Alvarez.

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY. How long have you been receiving the D.C. Scholarship?

Ms. ALVAREZ. Since 2004.

Mr. MCHENRY. Since 2004. Was that first year—

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY [continuing]. Really tough?

Ms. ALVAREZ. No, it wasn't.

Mr. MCHENRY. I think you are bragging, too.

Well, you know, not just having your parents involved makes such a huge difference, but, Ms. Alvarez, you mentioned that Sacred Heart School is the only bilingual Catholic school in the D.C. area.

Ms. ALVAREZ. Correct.

Mr. MCHENRY. How important is it for you to have that choice of having a bilingual school?

Ms. ALVAREZ. It is important because at the same time I don't lose my background of Spanish from where I come from, but yet I get the language of English. So I still have both languages in my life.

Mr. MCHENRY. So I also asked Mr. Holassie this. Ms. Alvarez, are you prepared—I asked if he was prepared to go to college. Are you prepared to go to high school?

Ms. ALVAREZ. Yes, certainly.

Mr. MCHENRY. And where are you going to go?

Ms. ALVAREZ. I got two acceptance letters, one from St. John's and one from Carroll, but I am choosing Carroll.

Mr. MCHENRY. You think that is a good choice, Mr. Holassie?

Mr. HOLASSIE. Yes.

Mr. MCHENRY. Thank you for your testimony. I know it is tough to sit before this committee and have folks lecture you or ask you questions or both, but thank you so much for being an advocate for opportunity. Thank you.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. McHenry.

The Chair would recognize the distinguished gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and, again, congratulations on your first hearing.

Congratulations to all of you, to Mr. Holassie and Ms. Alvarez specifically. You have done a wonderful job this morning, and it is a reflection on your commitment to not only your own education, but the education of all of your friends and neighbors. And to Ms. Jackson and Ms. Bennett, I appreciate you being here as well.

Let me just first reassure Ms. Jackson and Ms. Bennett there has been some conversation about, given the uncertainty right now, over the funding going forward, would there be a process in place to make sure that children that are currently in the program now would stay in the program; and we have gotten assurances from the administration that within the debate going on in Congress today that the administration is going to do everything in its power to make sure that students that are currently in the program will be able to stay. And I think many of us will be very interested in continuing that conversation.

Let me just ask a simple question. When we talk about this program, this is clearly about continuing your commitment to your education, but it is also about making the public school system better. That is the argument for this program. And I would just be interested in your assessment over the—now, you guys have only been in it for a few years, but as parents and as advocates, you have been watching this program for a series of years. I would be interested as to your assessment as to what this program, over the 5-years that it has been in place, has meant to the D.C. public school system. Have you seen the D.C. public school system get better as a result of this program? Simple question. Maybe I will go first to Ms. Bennett and Ms. Jackson, then turn it over to you guys, because you certainly have friends and neighbors that are still in the D.C. public school system. I would be interested as to what you think it has meant for that system.

Ms. BENNETT. To be honest, I see the D.C. public school system is attempting to try, but to be frankly honest, from what I have seen, and this is just a few schools, I can't say for all, the few schools in my area, Ward 8, no, they haven't gotten better. They are attempting, but no.

Mr. MURPHY. Ms. Jackson.

Ms. JACKSON. I agree as well. In certain wards the schools seem to be I don't want to say pushed aside, but they are not given as much attention as in schools that would be in the wards where the majority of these schools are attended by white children. The schools in Ward 7, Ward 8, and some schools in Ward 6 are underperforming schools because they don't get the attention that they should, and that didn't just happen; it has been that way for years. I have lived in both Ward 8 and Ward 7, and those schools in those wards where my daughter would have to attend now are still underperforming schools. So I see that the D.C. public school system are making efforts to make that system better, but now, as it stands, I still would not want my daughter to attend the D.C. public school system.

Mr. MURPHY. How about you guys? When you talk to your friends who have been in the public school system, do you get the sense that it has gotten better over the last 5 years? Ms. Alvarez.

Ms. ALVAREZ. I agree with Ms. Bennett and Ms. Jackson. I can see that they are trying to make the schools better, but they are not really putting their best foot forward to go all the way and make them the best that they could be. But they are trying.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. Holassie.

Mr. HOLASSIE. I agree with Ms. Bennett and Ms. Jackson. It seems that they are attempting, they are trying to make the public school system better, but it is just not to the standards and expectations that it should be at that I would say, OK, I would go back into the public school system and I would be successful, I would be great.

Mr. MURPHY. Thank you for your comments. The idea, obviously, behind a voucher system is that it pressures the public school system not just to try, but to actually get better in the end. And the reason I asked that question is because the theory sometimes doesn't always match up to the reality. And as Mr. Cummings so eloquently stated, the public school system in this Nation cannot get better, no matter how many more vouchers that you put into the system, if they don't have the resources to do it, if they don't have the attention to the schools and the neighborhoods that need to get better.

And why it is so maddening for some of us to be in Washington today is that while this is, I think, a very, very useful debate, in other rooms around this capital we are having a debate about sucking billions of dollars out of those very schools that we are asking to get better, and it seems an impossible situation to put schools across this city and across this country in.

And I really appreciate you guys being here. You have been incredibly eloquent and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Murphy.

And on that I think everyone can agree. We cannot thank you enough for your attendance, for your eloquence, as Mr. Murphy cited, for your willingness to share your experience with us.

What I would propose at this point, selfishly, I would like to come thank you in person, so we will take a short recess as the second panel comes forward, and I will be heading down toward you

to thank you in person and write notes so you two can go back to school if you want to, OK? Thank you. We will be in short recess.
[Recess.]

Mr. GOWDY. We will now recognize our second panel. I will introduce them as a whole, then we will take the oath and begin the questioning. Let me welcome you and thank you for not only being here, but also for letting the children go first and perhaps go back to school, or maybe not.

Mr. Kevin Chavous is the chairman of the Black Alliance for Education Options. Mr. Chavous is also a former D.C. City Council member and a former chairman of the Education Committee.

Dr. Patrick Wolf is a professor and 21st Century Chair in School Choice, Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Wolf was the principle investigator for impact evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program through a contract with the U.S. Department of Education.

Ms. Betty North is the principal and CEO of the Preparatory School of the District of Columbia.

Dr. Ramona Edelin is the executive director of the D.C. Association of Public Charter Schools.

Welcome to you all. And I will administer the oath. I would ask you to please rise and raise your right hands.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. GOWDY. Let the record reflect that all witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Thank you, and you may be seated.

Thanks to all four of you. I will recognize myself for 5 minutes and then I will recognize Mr. Davis.

Dr. Edelin, were you present for the first panel?

Oh, I am sorry. I apologize. If you couldn't tell, it is my first one. And if you can't tell yet, you will before it is all said and done. So despite my overeagerness to ask questions, we really would rather hear from you. So we will start with you, Mr. Chavous, and we will go in order from my left to right. Thank you.

STATEMENTS OF KEVIN CHAVOUS, CHAIRMAN OF THE BLACK ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION OPTIONS; DR. PATRICK WOLF, PROFESSOR AND 21ST CENTURY CHAIR IN SCHOOL CHOICE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REFORM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS; BETTY NORTH, PRINCIPAL AND CEO OF THE PREPARATORY SCHOOL OF DC; AND DR. RAMONA EDELIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DC ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

STATEMENT OF KEVIN CHAVOUS

Mr. CHAVOUS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Davis and Congresswoman Norton, members of the committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. With your indulgence, I would like to use my time this morning to offer some perspective about the importance of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program not just for District residents, but also as it relates to the national fight to ensure that each and every American school child receive a high quality education.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, I served on the Council of the District of Columbia for 12 years, and over half of that time I chaired the Council's Education Committee. I am proud of the fact that during my chairmanship I was able to help usher school choice into the District, first by way of charter schools and then through the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

As to the creation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, let me be very clear. Mr. Chairman, this program was not forced upon or foisted on the residents of the District of Columbia. I know; I was there. The three-sector initiative was a collaborative undertaking between the city and the Federal Government. We insisted on the three-sector approach, which provided equal funding for D.C. public schools, D.C. public charter schools, and the OSP. We worked very hard—and when I say we, I mean then-Mayor Tony Williams, School Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and I—we worked very, very hard to develop a program that fit the unique educational needs of the District, where not one dime was diverted from public schools. Anyone who suggests otherwise is being fundamentally and practically dishonest about the history and origin of the OSP.

Today, the students who testified have spoken directly about the positive impact of the OSP on their lives. For them and thousands of other District children, the OSP has been a lifeline for not just them, but for their families. Without this program, as Ron Holassie said, they wouldn't have made it. It is just that simple.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program sends a clear message to families, to children, and to our community: If you are low-income, if you are stuck in a school that is failing, that is unsafe, and that no amount of money can fix right away, we are not going to make an experiment of you, we are going to help you; and we are going to do it not 5 years from today, but today. We are going to give you a chance at success. And the essence of the program is in its name, opportunity.

The D.C. OSP has provided scholarships along the lowest income D.C. children to attend better schools, private schools that are mere blocks away from the public schools that long ago stopped serving their needs. The program is open to everyone; there is no discrimination, there is no cherry-picking.

And the results are stunning. Graduation rates are 91 percent for those who use the scholarships. That is 42 percent higher than traditional public schools. Improved reading scores for students, parental satisfaction is overwhelming. And the U.S. Department of Education, as you will hear from Patrick Wolf, said that the program was one of the most effective programs they have ever studied. By any measure, by any test, by any rational standard, this hearing should be about how we can expand this program not in Washington, DC, but in other parts of the Nation. Instead, by a cruel twist of political fate, we are here trying to save the very program that should be a model for our country.

Which leads me to the final point I need to make during this testimony: the importance of the OSP in the larger national educational reform landscape. Since leaving the Council, I have been deeply immersed in the national education reform movement. In-

deed, I have become a student of what ails our schools and what does or what does not work for our kids.

The truth is we know how to educate children; we know what works for them. But often we don't have the will or courage to truly put our children first when we make policy that affects them. Plus, our over-allegiance to a one-size-fits-all approach to system reform has blinded us to the reality of many of today's kids' lives. Yes, we need to fix D.C. public schools, and many other school districts around the country. But we also need to save individual children today, children who can't wait for the 3 to 5 year reform plan du jour.

During the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King talked about the fierce urgency of now. People should not have to wait to get their freedom, he argued; they are entitled to those freedoms now, not in the distant future.

Today we are engaged in a similar freedom fight, one involving ensuring that all American children receive the education that they deserve. Like Dr. King's battle cry, our children are entitled to receive a quality education today, not tomorrow.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has responded to that clarion call by offering a quality education to children in this city who otherwise would be trapped in failing schools. I applaud those of you on this committee who support its reauthorization, and urge all of you to join us in this fight to educate each and every child by any means necessary. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Chavous follows:]

Testimony of Kevin P. Chavous

Before the Subcommittee on Health Care, District Of Columbia,
Census and the National Archives

March 1, 2011

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And the results are stunning. Graduation rates are 91 percent for those who used their scholarships. Improved reading scores for students. Parental satisfaction is overwhelming. The US Department of Education said that the program was one of the most effective programs they've ever studied. By any measure,

by any test, by any rational standard, this hearing should be about how we can expand this program not just in Washington, D.C. but into other parts of our nation. Instead, by a cruel twist of political fate, we're here trying to save the very program that should be a model for our nation.

Which leads me to the final point I need to make during my testimony. The importance of the OSP in the larger national education reform landscape. Since leaving the Council, I have been deeply immersed in the national education reform movement. Indeed, I have become a student of what ails our schools and what does or does not work for our kids.

The truth is, we know what works for our kids, but often we don't have the will or courage to truly put our kids first when we make policy that affects them. Plus, our over allegiance to a one size fits all approach to system reform has blinded us to the reality of many kids' lives today. Yes, we need to fix DC Public Schools and many other school districts around the country. But we also need to save individual children today. Children who can't wait for the 3-5 year reform plan dujour.

During the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King talked about the Fierce Urgency of Now. People should not have to wait to get their freedom, he argued, they are entitled to those freedoms now, not in the distant future.

Today, we are engaged in a similar freedom fight. One involving ensuring that all American children receive the education that they deserve. Like Dr. King's battle cry, our children are entitled to receive a quality education today, not tomorrow.

The DC OSP has responded to that clarion call by offering a quality education to children in this city who otherwise would be trapped in failing schools. I applaud those of you on this committee who support its reauthorization and urge all of you join us as we fight to educate each and every child, by any means necessary.

Thank you.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Chavous.

Dr. Wolf, we will recognize you now for your 5 minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF PATRICK WOLF

Mr. WOLF. Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis, distinguished members, I am pleased to be with you today to discuss my professional judgment regarding what we know about the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program [OSP]. I served as the principle investigator of the research team hired by the U.S. Department of Education to conduct an independent evaluation of the OSP.

Since lotteries determine if eligible students did or did not receive an Opportunity Scholarship, we were able to use a gold standard experimental research design to determine what impact the OSP had on participants.

What did we find? The students in our study graduated from high school at significantly higher rates as a result of the OSP. As portrayed in exhibit 1, using an Opportunity Scholarship increased the likelihood of a student graduating by 21 percentage points, from 70 percent to 91 percent. In scientific terms, we are more than 99 percent confident that access to school choice through the Opportunity Scholarship Program was the reason why OSP students graduated at these much higher rates. Students who applied to the program from public schools that had been labeled in need of improvement were the highest service priority of the OSP. They graduated at a rate that was 20 percentage points higher as a result of using a scholarship.

Evidence that students achieved higher test scores due to the OSP is somewhat less conclusive than the evidence that they graduated at higher rates. Our analysis of test score data across all years of the study suggests that OSP students likely benefited academically from the program in reading, but probably not in math. The statistical probability that the OSP reading gains we observed were somehow false discoveries of mere statistical noise was 9 percent after 2 years, 1 percent after 3 years, and 6 percent after 4 years. We had set 5 percent uncertainty, or 95 percent confidence, as the critical level for judging an observed difference to be a conclusive impact of the program. The reading gains from the OSP exceeded that high bar in year three of the study, but failed just short, by 1 percentage point, in the final year, when hundreds of students had graduated out of the study and, therefore, shrunk our sample.

Skeptics might claim that the positive impacts of the Opportunity Scholarship Program on reading achievement in the final analysis are not real, but there is only a 6 percent chance that we would have observed such test score gains for the OSP students if in fact the program had no effect. Parents were more satisfied with their child's school as a result of the OSP. The proportion of parents who assigned a high grade of A or B to their child's school was 10 percentage points higher based on scholarship use by their child. We can be 99 percent confident this was a true impact of the program. Parents also viewed their children as safer in school if they participated in the OSP.

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Evaluation [NCEE], has sponsored a total of 14 experimental studies of education programs, including our study of the OSP. Nine of the other 13 evaluations of such interventions as student mentoring, reading programs, and teacher training reported no statistically significant impacts of the program on any student outcome in any year.

Another student of an after-school initiative found that the program had negative effects on student reaching achievement that balanced out positive effects on math. The clear positive impact of the OSP on high school graduation makes it one of only four educational programs to demonstrate effectiveness in an experiment sponsored by the NCEE, and it generated the second largest positive impact uncovered to date.

Moreover, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has proven effective at boosting the outcome that matters most: educational attainment. President Obama, in a speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce 1 year ago today, stated emphatically that graduating from high school is an economic imperative. Both the President and Secretary Duncan have stressed the importance of raising the graduation rate, because graduating from high school is closely associated with a variety of positive personal and social outcomes, including higher lifetime earnings and lower rates of unemployment and crime.

Since each additional high school graduate saves the Nation an average of \$260,000 due to increased taxes on higher earnings and lower law enforcement costs, the 449 additional high school graduates due to the operation of the OSP will save our Nation over \$116 million, meaning the program more than pays for itself.

The research record on the first federally sponsored K-12 scholarship program is filled with good news: the students definitely are graduating at much higher rates; they appear to be reading better; parents are more satisfied and live in less fear for their child's safety. Now it is up to Congress and the President to decide if additional disadvantaged families in our Nation's capital should receive access to the benefits from this demonstrably successful education program.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wolf follows:]

DR. PATRICK J. WOLF

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE HEARING "THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN"**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM:
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE AND DC**

MARCH 1ST, 2011

Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis, Distinguished Members,

I am pleased to be with you today to discuss what we know about the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). I served as the principal investigator of an outstanding team of researchers who conducted a congressionally-mandated independent study of the OSP supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. I am also a professor of education policy at the University of Arkansas with more than a decade of experience evaluating school choice programs in D.C., Milwaukee, New York, and Dayton, Ohio. Although the facts that I present to you today are taken directly from our recently completed impact evaluation of the OSP, the ideas and opinions that I express are the professional judgments of me alone and do not necessarily represent any official positions of the evaluation team, the University of Arkansas, the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education.

Study Background

Our evaluation of the OSP used the most rigorous research method available for determining the impact of this school choice program. Parents who seek schooling options for their children are likely to be highly motivated to promote their children's educational success. That high level of parental motivation that leads parents to participate in school choice programs probably also contributes to greater student achievement over time, leading to what we call "self-selection bias" in the research world.

To ensure that parent motivation does not bias studies of school choice programs, researchers over the past decade have focused on evaluating them using experimental research designs called Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) whenever possible. With an RCT design, a group of students that all qualify for a voucher or scholarship program and whose parents are equally motivated to exercise school choice are subject to a scholarship lottery. The students who win the lottery become the experimental "treatment" group. The students who lose the lottery become the experimental control group. Since only a school voucher and mere chance distinguish the treatment students from their control counterparts, any subsequent difference in student outcomes for the treatment students can be attributed with great reliability to the voucher intervention. That is, the outcomes from the control group represent what would have happened to the treatment group absent the program, and the treatment impact is therefore the treatment outcomes minus the control outcomes. Because of the rigor of experimental designs they are often dubbed the "gold standard" for policy evaluations and are widely used to evaluate the efficacy of medical drugs and procedures prior to such treatments being made available to the public.

Student and School Participation

Two cohorts of students were followed for purposes of this evaluation. All of the students were attending public schools or rising Kindergartners at the time of application. Cohort 1 consisted of 492 students entering grades 6-12 in 2004. Cohort 2 consisted of 1,816 students entering grades K-12 in 2005. The characteristics and outcomes of these two groups, combined into an impact sample of 2,308 students, were the focus of our impact evaluation. A total of 1,387 students in the impact sample won the scholarship lottery and were thereby assigned to the treatment group, while the remaining 921 students who did not win the lottery were assigned to the control group. Over the five years of program operation from 2004 to 2009, other students received scholarships without having to go through a lottery. These students were not included in the rigorous impact evaluation because no appropriate comparison group was available for them.

Evidence from the study confirms that the OSP serves a highly disadvantaged group of DC students. Descriptive information from the first two annual reports about program participation indicates that over 90 percent of students are African American and nine percent are Hispanic. Their family incomes averaged less than \$20,000 in the baseline year in which they applied for the program. Overall, participating students were performing well below national norms in reading and math when they applied to the OSP. Forty-four percent of students in both cohorts were attending a public school designated as “in need of improvement” (SINI) between 2003 and 2005.

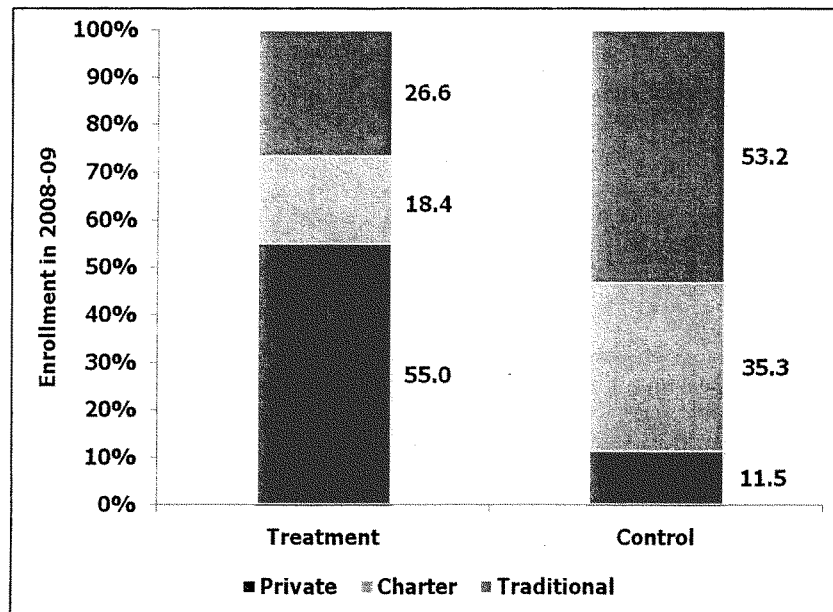
The Opportunity Scholarship Program is designed to facilitate the enrollment of low-income District students in private schools of their parents’ choosing. It does not and cannot guarantee enrollment in a private school, but the \$7,500 voucher should make such enrollments relatively common among the students who won the scholarship lottery. The eligible students who lost the scholarship lottery and therefore were assigned to the control group still might attend a private school but they would have to do so by drawing upon resources outside of the OSP. At the same time, students in both the scholarship treatment group and the control group have access to a large number of public charter schools in the District.

The implications of these realities is that, for this evaluation of the OSP, assignment to the treatment group did not necessarily mean private schooling and assignment to the control group did not necessarily mean education in a traditional public school. Members of both the treatment and control groups attended all three types of schools – private, public charter, and traditional public – after 4 or more years of the voucher experiment, though the proportions that attended each type differed significantly based on whether or not they won the scholarship lottery (figure 1). About 55 percent of the students who won the voucher lottery and provided outcome data in the final year of data collection were attending private schools. Less than 12 percent of the students who lost the voucher lottery were enrolled in private schools that same year. Over 18 percent of the treatment students chose to attend a public charter school four or more years after receiving a scholarship offer, compared to over 35 percent of the control group who opted for that public school choice option. Almost 27 percent of the treatment group students were enrolled in traditional public schools in the final year of data collection, compared with over 53 percent of control group students in such schools.

I see these data as underscoring that these families wanted educational options for their children. Over 73 percent of them placed their child in a private or public school of choice four or more years after winning the scholarship lottery and nearly 47 percent of them did likewise

even if they lost the lottery. This was a group of families with a strong motivation to exercise parental school choice.

Figure 1. Types of Schools Attended by the Treatment and Control Groups in 2008-09



Source: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report* (NCEE 2010-4018), Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2010, Table 2-4, p. 27.

The enrollment pattern of students in the evaluation also highlights the fact that the comparison of the treatment and control groups in the final year of the analysis does not amount to a comparison between “all choice” and “no choice.” Instead, it is a comparison of outcomes between a group exercising lots of private school choice and some public school choice with a group exercising a small amount of private school choice and a substantial amount of public school choice. Any differences between the outcomes of the treatment and control groups therefore indicate the incremental impact of adding private school choice through the OSP to the existing schooling options for low-income DC families.

If one’s purpose is to evaluate the effects of a specific public policy, such as the OSP, then the comparison of the average outcomes of the treatment and control groups, regardless of what proportion attended which types of school, is most appropriate. A school voucher program cannot force scholarship recipients to use a voucher, nor can it preclude control group students

from attending private schools at their own expense. A voucher program only can offer students scholarships that they subsequently may or may not use. Nevertheless, the mere offer of a scholarship, in and of itself, clearly has no impact on the educational outcomes of students. A scholarship could only change the future of a student if it were actually used.

Fortunately, two statistical techniques are available that draw upon the unbiased results of the pure experimental analysis of treatment and control group differences. In the opinion of many researchers, including myself, these methodological approaches produce reliable estimates of the average effect of using a voucher compared to not being offered one and the average effect of attending private school with or without a voucher compared to not attending private school. The technique that produces the estimate of the effect of using a voucher is called a Bloom adjustment. Since lottery winners who never used a scholarship could not have been affected by it, the average impact of the voucher program on student outcomes that was generated by the entire sample of treatment students – users and non-users alike – is simply re-scaled by dividing it by the percentage of the treatment group that actually availed themselves of the treatment. For example, if 80 percent of the treatment students used their scholarships at any time since the voucher lottery and the treatment group as a whole averaged test score outcomes that were 4 points higher than the control group, the Bloom-adjusted estimated effect of using a scholarship on test scores would be $4/.8$ or 5 points.

The method for estimating the effect of attending versus not attending private schools, called Instrumental Variable (IV) analysis, produces estimates that tend to be larger than Bloom-adjusted estimates because they adjust for both non-use of the scholarship by the treatment group and private school attendance by members of the control group. As such, an IV analysis of the effect of private schooling is not an evaluation of a school voucher program *per se* but, instead, is an evaluation of the effect of the condition (private school enrollment) that a voucher program seeks to facilitate. Because such analyses place heavy demands on the underlying data, smaller differences that are found to be statistically significant at the purely experimental stage can end up as larger differences that are not statistically significant when estimated through IV analysis. The estimation of the impact of private schooling using the IV technique also requires specific information about whether or not students in the study attended private schools, information that is not always available for all students. As a result, in my remarks, I will focus on the purely experimental impacts of the OSP, called the "intent to treat" (ITT) estimate, and the effect of actually using a scholarship, called the "impact on the treated" (IOT) estimate. Whenever one sees "ITT" in the graphs that follow, that designates the impact of being offered an Opportunity Scholarship, whereas "IOT" signifies the impact of the program from using a scholarship. The effects of attending private schools for the students in our study are available in the appendices of our reports for anyone who is interested in those figures.

In our reports, we identify the differences between the treatment and control groups and then describe whether or not those differences are "statistically significant." A difference is judged to be statistically significant if, with a high level of confidence, we can rule out random statistical noise as its cause, leaving the program intervention as the only possible explanation for the difference. The level of confidence that any experimental difference is a true impact of the program being evaluated ranges from 0 to 99.9 percent. Although evaluators usually report the actual confidence level associated with each difference, we often simplify our analyses of program impacts by using a specific cut-off point to judge whether impacts are statistically significant. We thus transform the question of statistical significance from a matter of "more or

less" to a matter of "either-or." The most common cut-off points are 90 percent and 95 percent confidence.

We used the 95 percent confidence level as the minimum threshold for an impact to be judged statistically significant in our evaluation, a standard that I characterized in previous congressional testimony as setting a high bar for statistical significance. Any difference with less than a five percent chance of being mere statistical noise was identified as a statistically significant program impact. Any difference with more than a five percent chance of being mere statistical noise was identified simply as no impact. It was 95 percent confidence or bust. In scientific terms, holding fast to the 95 percent confidence level as the standard for judging statistical significance means that you are four times more likely to miss a true program impact than you are to embrace a false one. Because the use of strict confidence level cut-points is somewhat controversial in the scientific literature, and different evaluators use different cut-points, in the interest of full information I will describe to the committee the specific confidence level that we can associate with each OSP impact finding and leave it to members to judge if, for example, 91 percent confidence is sufficient to think that the program really made a difference regarding that outcome or if the 9 percent chance that random noise produced the finding is enough to doubt the result. Reasonable people can and do differ regarding such interpretations.

OSP Impacts on Educational Attainment

The most important outcome we examined in our evaluation of the OSP was the program's impact on student educational attainment, as measured by the rate of high school graduation. President Obama, in a speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce one year ago today, stated emphatically that "Graduating from high school is an economic imperative" because graduating is closely associated with a variety of positive personal and social outcomes. For example, a study by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) determined that graduating from high school increases lifetime earnings by \$8,500 per year and decreases the risk of unemployment by one-third. A study of high school drop-outs and graduates in California by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin concluded that each graduate reduces the cost of crime by \$112,000. Conditions are notably better for individuals and society when they graduate from high school.

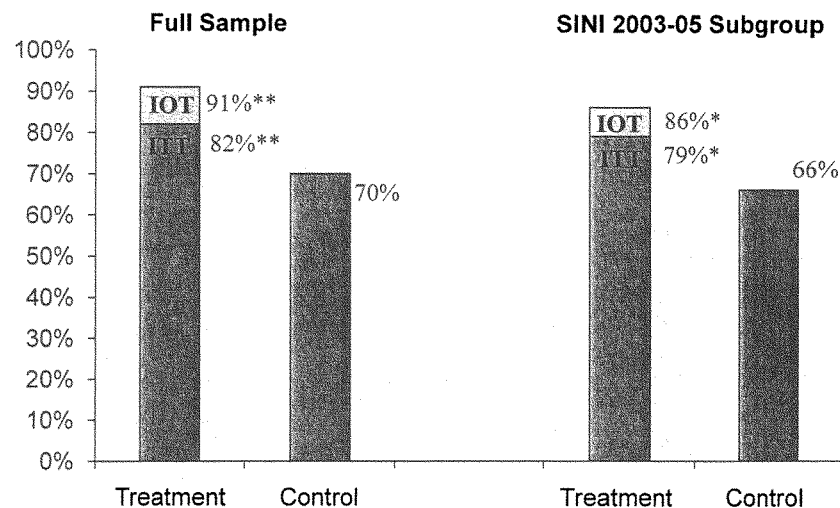
Based on parent reports, the students in our study graduated from high school at significantly higher rates as a result of the OSP. The treatment group students graduated from high school at a rate of 82 percent which was 12 percentage points higher than the control group rate of 70 percent. Adjusting for students who never used their scholarship, the impact of using an Opportunity Scholarship was to increase the probability of graduating from 70 percent to 91 percent -- a positive impact of 21 percentage points (figure 2). We can be more than 99 percent confident that access to school choice through the Opportunity Scholarship Program, and not mere statistical noise, was the reason why OSP students graduated at these higher rates.

The positive impact of the OSP on high school graduation was also clear for the high-priority SINI students in the study. Access to the OSP increased the graduation rate for SINI students from 66 percent to 79 percent. The impact of using an Opportunity Scholarship on the likelihood of high school graduation was to increase it by 20 percentage points, from 66 percent to 86 percent. This positive impact of the OSP on the high school graduation rate of SINI students was statistically significant with more than 98 percent confidence.

Conclusive experimental results, such as these important findings regarding the positive impact of the OSP on reported high school graduation rates, permit us to make reliable forecasts. For example, Cecelia Rouse, a member of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors,

has determined that each additional high school graduate saves the nation an average of \$260,000 as a result of higher taxable earnings and lower demands for social services. That means that the 449 additional high school graduates due to the operation of the OSP will save our nation approximately \$116,625,600 over the long run. These experimental results also mean that approximately 111 students in the experimental control group will fail to graduate from high school simply because they were denied access to the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Figure 2. Impact of the OSP on High School Graduation Rates, Overall & SINI Subgroup



*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

**Statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, NCEE 2010-4018, Table 3-5.

NOTE: ITT means the impact of the voucher offer; IOT means the impact of scholarship use.

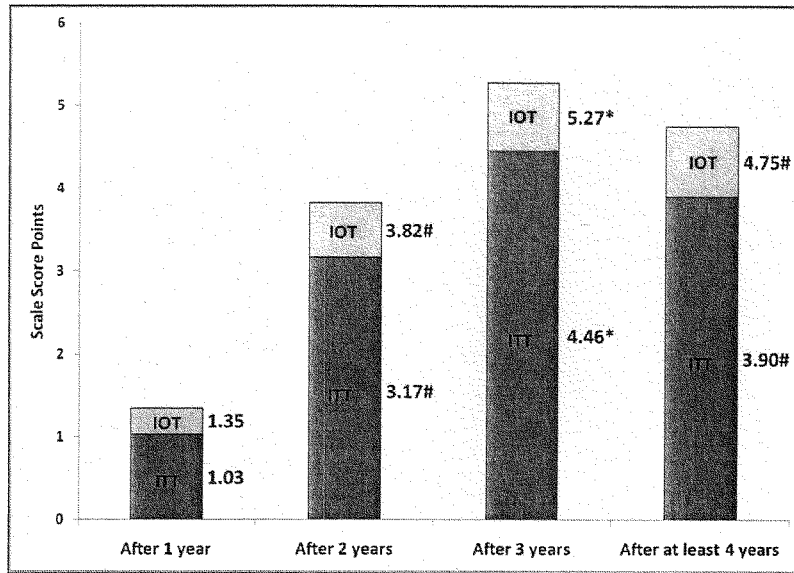
The Opportunity Scholarship Program and Student Achievement

Our analysis of test score data across all four years of the study suggested that, overall, OSP students likely benefited academically from the program in reading but not in math. The statistical probability that the OSP had a positive impact on student reading scores was 44 percent after one year, 91 percent after two years, 99 percent after three years, and 94 percent after four or more years (figure 3). If one uses the 95 percent confidence level as the minimum threshold for an impact to be judged "statistically significant", as we did in our study, then only the positive reading impacts in year 3 could be conclusively attributed to the program. If, instead, one used 90 percent confidence as the standard, then the positive reading impacts of the OSP were statistically significant in every evaluation year except the initial year of program implementation. Another way to think about the statistical significance of the reading impacts in

the final year of the evaluation is that, if you claimed that the OSP had no positive impact on student reading achievement, using the final year results as the basis of your claim, there is a 94 percent chance that you would be wrong.

Although the students offered Opportunity Scholarships on average consistently scored higher than the control group in math, those differences were so small each year that we cannot rule out statistical noise, with any reasonable level of confidence, as their cause.

Figure 3. Impact of the OSP on Reading Achievement Overall, by Years After Application



#Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., "School Vouchers in the Nation's Capital: Summary of Experimental Impacts," in *School Choice and School Improvement: Research in State, District and Community Contexts*, Mark Berends, Marisa Cannata and Ellen Goldring (eds.), Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, forthcoming in 2011.

NOTE: Differences between each year's cumulative impact estimates have not been tested to determine their statistical significance. ITT means the impact of the voucher offer; IOT means the impact of scholarship use.

Why are we less confident that the OSP students gained in reading in the final year of the analysis compared to year 3? Statistical significance is largely a function of the size of impacts and the size of samples. Larger differences supported by evidence from more study participants are more likely to be significant at high confidence levels than are smaller differences supported by evidence from fewer participants. In year three, we observed an average reading achievement difference of 4.5 scale score points between the treatment and control group and a gain of 5.3 scale score points from using an Opportunity Scholarship. A total of 96 percent of the students in the study were still in 12th grade or below, which means we were able to administer achievement tests to them. A sizable reading achievement difference informed by a large sample

of testable students produced a high 99 percent confidence level regarding the statistical significance of the year 3 reading impacts of the OSP. Between year 3 and the final year of data collection, a large cohort of 211 students graduated out of the testable grade range. Only 87 percent of the initial impact sample of students remained in testable grades for the final achievement analysis. In that final year, the difference between the average reading scores of the remaining treatment and control group students was 3.9 -- a decrease of 13 percent from the year 3 difference of 4.5. A somewhat smaller reading achievement difference informed by a smaller sample of testable students produced a more modest 94 percent confidence level regarding the statistical significance of the final year reading impacts of the OSP. One could argue that the year 3 reading impacts are the better gauge of the program's achievement impacts, since it was based on more evidence than the final year impacts. One could also argue that the final year impacts are the better barometer of the OSP's test score impacts because it gave a smaller sample of students more time to be influenced by the program. Either claim is reasonable.

Because either the third or final year achievement impacts could be viewed as the most conclusive evidence of the effect of the OSP on reading, I characterize the educational significance of both sets of impacts here. One constructive way to view achievement gains in terms of additional months of instruction. The overall reading gains from the OSP observed after three years, which we know with 99 percent confidence were caused by the program, represent the equivalent of about 3.1 additional months of schooling for the entire treatment group and an additional 3.7 months of schooling due to the use of a scholarship (Table 1). The reading gains from the OSP observed in the final year of the study, which we know with 94 percent confidence were caused by the program, represent the equivalent of about 2.8 additional months of schooling for the entire treatment group and an additional 3.4 months of schooling due to the use of a scholarship. The year 3 results suggest that students who used an Opportunity Scholarship gained about 1.2 months of additional learning per year; whereas, the final year results that they gained about 0.9 months of additional learning per year.

Table 1. Estimated Impacts in Months of Schooling of the Scholarship Offer and Use of a Scholarship for Reading Impacts in Year 3 and the Final Year of the Evaluation

Student Achievement: Reading	Months of Schooling	
	Impact of the Scholarship Offer	Impact of Scholarship Use
Overall year 3	3.1	3.7
Overall final year	2.8	3.4

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, NCEE 2009-4050, Table 3-4; Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Experimental Impacts After at Least Four Years*, paper presented at the National Bureau of Economic Research Education Program Meeting, Nov. 1-12, 2010, Table 9.

The Pattern of Achievement Impacts by Key Subgroups

Beyond the evidence suggesting that the OSP increased overall reading scores, the program demonstrated a positive impact on the reading achievement of five subgroups of participating students across multiple years of the evaluation, with at least 90 percent and often with 95 percent confidence that these were true program impacts. However, because the subgroup analyses involve significance tests on multiple groupings of students, any one of which, at the 95 percent confidence level, has about a 5 percent chance of being a false discovery, we should treat

these subgroup results with less certainty than the overall reading achievement results discussed above.

When examined as separate subgroups, five types of students experienced significant reading impacts at various points in our evaluation of the OSP. Students who were not attending schools in need of improvement prior to entering the program demonstrated reading gains from the program at the subgroup level in year 2 (96 percent confidence), year 3 (99 percent confidence), and the final year (98 percent confidence). Students in the higher two-thirds of the performance distribution, whose average reading test score was at the 37th National Percentile Rank at baseline, improved their reading test scores due to the OSP in year 2 (98 percent confidence), year 3 (98 percent confidence), and in the final year (96 percent confidence). Female students demonstrated positive reading impacts from the program in year 3 (96 percent confidence) and in the final year of the evaluation (95 percent confidence). Students entering grades K-8 at baseline, where slots were plentiful in a wide variety of participating private schools, gained in reading achievement due to the program in year 2 (92 percent confidence) and year 3 (99 percent confidence). During the final year of the analysis, the students who were entering grades K-8 at baseline represented almost the entire sample still in testable grades and therefore could not be a part of the final subgroup analysis. Finally, Cohort 1 students demonstrated positive reading impacts at the subgroup level in year 2 (96 percent confidence) and year 3 (96 percent confidence). By the final year of the evaluation, so many members of the first cohort had graduated from high school that we could not analyze their test score impacts as a distinct subgroup.

Reading impacts for the other five subgroups examined individually – applicants from schools in need of improvement (i.e. SINI), students in the lower one-third of the performance distribution at baseline, males, students entering high school grades at baseline, and students in Cohort 2 – were not statistically significant in any of the years of the analysis. This does not mean that those subgroups of students did not benefit from the program, as research results never prove a negative, but it does mean that reading gains were not clearly evident at the subgroup level for those types of students. The fact that significant reading impacts were not observed for the subgroup of SINI students is noteworthy, since Congress designated SINI students as the highest service priority for the program. Math impacts were not statistically significant for any of the 10 subgroups examined after two, three or four or more years.

In sum, the evidence is conclusive that OSP students performed better on reading tests after three years as a result of the program. There is additional supportive evidence that the program had a positive effect on reading achievement in year 2 and the final year of the evaluation, as well. Five of 10 distinct subgroups of students demonstrated statistically significant reading gains from the program in multiple years of the evaluation. Most of those subgroup impacts were statistically significant with greater than 95 percent confidence and even after adjusting for the multiple comparisons involved in such subgroup analyses. Any claim that the OSP had no significant impact on student reading achievement would fly in the face of a wealth of scientific evidence to the contrary.

Overall Impacts on Parent and Student Satisfaction

Whenever school choice researchers have asked about satisfaction with schools, parents who were given the chance to select their child's school have reported much higher levels of satisfaction. Students themselves, for any number of possible reasons, have rarely described themselves as more satisfied with the new schools chosen by their parents. The satisfaction

results from the final year of the OSP evaluation fit this pattern of previous studies. The proportion of parents who assigned a high grade of A or B to their child's school was 8 percentage points higher if they were in the treatment group, 10 percentage points higher based on scholarship use. The impact of the OSP on increasing parent satisfaction with their child's school was statistically significant with more than 99 percent confidence. Parents also rated the safety of their children in school as higher if they had been awarded or used an Opportunity Scholarship, a positive program impact that was statistically significant with 98 percent confidence in the final year of the study. Students in grades 4-12, when asked similar questions, were no more likely to be satisfied with their school or describe it as safe if they were in the treatment compared to the control group.

Interpreting the Findings

What does this pattern of results suggest about the effectiveness of the OSP? Any answer to that question is bound to be somewhat subjective, so I think the best way to judge the program's impact is to compare the academic outcomes from the OSP with those from randomized control trials of other education programs.

The National Center for Educational Evaluation (NCEE) at the Institute of Education Sciences has released the results of 13 other studies that, like this one, employ the methodological rigor of random assignment to distinct treatment and control groups. The DC OSP evaluation is one of only four of these 14 NCEE studies to report overall positive impacts, statistically significant with at least 95 percent confidence, on academic outcomes such as achievement or attainment (table 2). The other three federal education programs which have been confirmed to deliver overall achievement impacts are Problem Based Economic Instruction, K-PAVE Vocabulary Development, and Enhanced Reading Opportunities. The relative size of the OSP impact on boosting high school graduation rates, more than one-quarter standard deviation (SD) is the second largest statistically significant positive impact yet identified in an NCEE experimental analysis. Only the Problem Based Economic Instruction evaluation has reported larger positive impacts on student academic outcomes than those demonstrated in the evaluation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Nine other education programs have not demonstrated statistically significant academic impacts overall. The interventions that have not demonstrated statistically significant effects on student academic outcomes in NCEE experimental evaluations includes charter schooling, student mentoring, Reading First, classroom literacy interventions in Even Start, alternative teacher certification, initial teacher training, literacy intervention for adult English Language Learners, , Odyssey Math, and simplifying the wording of math questions. One other program, After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction, demonstrated a mix of positive, non-significant, and negative impacts on achievement. The larger point is that many federal education programs targeted at disadvantaged students have been the subjects of rigorous evaluations. Most of these programs have failed to demonstrate the ability to move disadvantaged students to significantly higher levels of academic outcomes such as achievement and high school graduation. In my opinion, by demonstrating statistically significant experimental impacts on boosting high school graduation rates and generating a wealth of evidence suggesting that students also benefited in reading achievement, the DC OSP has accomplished what few educational interventions can claim: It markedly improved important education outcomes for low-income inner-city students.

Table 2. NCEE Intervention Studies in Order of Significance of Academic Impacts, Through February 2011

	NCEE Single Intervention Study	Overall Significant Impact (95% Confidence)	Partial or Subgroup Sig. Impact
1	Effects of Problem Based Economics on High School Economics Instruction	Positive (Economics content knowledge; Economics problem-solving skills and application to real-world economic dilemmas) Impacts = .27-.32 SD	N/A
2	DC Opportunity Scholarship Program	Positive (Graduation, Reading Year 3) No effect (Math, Reading Year 4) Graduation Impact = .26 SD Year 3 Reading Impact = .13 SD	Some positive subgroups (Reading), some no effect
3	K-PAVE Program to Accelerate Vocabulary Development in Kindergarten	Positive (Vocab development: one month; Academic knowledge: one month; Vocab and comprehension support); No effect (Listening comprehension;) Impacts = .14 SD	N/A (insufficient power to calculate impacts)
4	Enhanced Reading Opportunities	Positive (1 year) Reading Impact = .08 SD	Some positive subgroups, some no effect
5	Evaluation of Charter School Impacts	No effect	Some positive subgroups (Math); some negative subgroups (Math)
6	DOE Student Mentoring Program	No effect	Some positive subgroups, some no effect
7	Reading First	No effect (3 years)	Improvements in student decoding skills
8	Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes in Even Start	No effect (literacy measures)	Improvements in parenting skills and children's social skills
9	Teacher Certification Routes	No effect	Some negative effect, most no effect
10	Comprehensive Elementary Teacher Induction	No effect	N/A
11	Reading Intervention for Low-Literate Adult ESL Learners	No effect	No effect
12	Effects of Compass Learning Odyssey Math on the Math Achievement of Selected Grade 4 Students in the Mid-Atlantic Region	No effect	No effect
13	Linguistic Modification of Math Test Item Sets	No effect	Some positive subgroups (depending on the scoring approach used), some no effect
14	After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction	Positive (Math after 1 year); No effect (Reading after 1 year, Math after 2 years); Negative (Reading after 2 years)	No effect
	Totals:	2 positive, 2 some pos., 9 no effect, 1 mix of pos./neg.	

NOTE: Items in top box show at least some overall significant positive effects with at least 95 percent confidence and no significant negative effects. SD means standard deviation units.

SOURCE: Calculated from review of the most recent evaluation reports where interventions were compared to a control group (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/>). Evaluations that merely compared interventions to each other are excluded.

Conclusion

For the past seven years, the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided income-disadvantaged students with government-financed scholarships or vouchers to facilitate their enrollment in participating private schools selected by their parents. Having collected and analyzed data from up to five years of student and parent experiences with the OSP, we have learned much about the program. The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program has proven itself to be a highly effective drop-out prevention program. The SINI students, who were the highest service priority of the program, graduated from high school at a rate that was 20 percentage points higher due to the use of an Opportunity Scholarship. We know, with more than 90 percent confidence, that the program has increased student reading performance. No program impacts have been observed in math achievement. When the data are parsed into smaller subgroups, half of those individual subgroups of students have demonstrated reading gains as a result of the program across multiple years of the evaluation. Parents, but not students, say that they are more satisfied with their schools if offered an Opportunity Scholarship and they view those schools as safer. No negative effects of the program were uncovered in any years of the rigorous government-sponsored evaluation.

Actual people often speak more eloquently than do statistics and scientists. I close by quoting the words of an OSP parent who attended one of the focus groups we conducted to augment the government evaluation of the program. Here is what the Opportunity Scholarship Program meant to her and her son who used a scholarship to attend a private high school in the District:

When my son dressed in that uniform with that green blazer, the white shirt, tie, gray trousers and he looked like a gentleman and a scholar and he had his hair cut and his glasses and he was just grinning from ear to ear that he was going to be a part of that [private school culture] and he went to school that day and he was excited about going to school.

Distinguished Members of Congress, the research evidence and testimonials of parents confirm that the District of Columbia is a better place because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Dr. Wolf.

Now we will recognize Ms. North for her 5 minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF BETTY NORTH

Ms. NORTH. Hello, distinguished members of the committee. My name is Betty Fenwick-North, and I am the Founder of Preparatory School of the District of Columbia.

The Preparatory School of the District of Columbia is a licensed, non-profit, private educational institute. We opened our doors in 1984 as a child development center and, over the last 26 years, as a result of the needs of our parents and students, have expanded from now to then to the 10th grade.

Our mission is to give our students the academic foundation that would allow them to be successful in life in a safe, caring, and structured environment that utilized the small classroom learning. We provide the intimate attention that a lot of today's youth require in order to reach the educational aptitude necessary for success. Our wonderful staff is able to adopt to each student's unique cognitive learning style, while placing emphasis on analyzing, reading, language, articulation, and writing. In addition to the academics, it is the aim of The Preparatory School of D.C. to assist the character building, developing the ability to preserve, integrity, and respect for themselves and their community.

The Preparatory School of D.C. is a family first school. We strive to instill good family values in each of our students. A majority of our students come from low income families. A number of our families have multiple children close to school age who would not have the opportunity to receive an education from a private institute if it were not for the Opportunity Scholarship. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has made it possible for many low income families to have more options to achieve and acquire quality education.

Over 150 students have been able to attend The Preparatory School of D.C. solely because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, an opportunity that has provided a sound and enriching educational experience. Students who attend The Preparatory School of D.C. range from those taking AP courses to those students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, as well as those who have been documented disciplinary problems that have involved the courts.

And as many parents, if they were able to testify, would all tell you, as they have constantly told us and we have heard from them, if it were not for the Opportunity Scholarship Program, many of these students would not have been able to experience and discovery that they are not just a statistic; they are individuals with needs that can and will be met.

Today's children are our future. Let us help you guide them and prepare them for the next level. The more options we provide these parents and their families, the better choices they can make for their situations; and the better choices they make, the better their chances of success.

In closing, I would like to say that I believe the Opportunity Scholarship has opened doors for parents to have choices for their

children's education, has empowered parents with the necessary financial sources to become more involved and influential in their children's education, and the Opportunity Scholarship has provided students and exposed the experience and the academic culture that private, religious, secular schools offer. At the end of the day, parents of youth who come from financially stable families have choices in which schools they would like to attend. Why can't parents of youth who come from low income homes also have the same choices provided to them through the Opportunity Scholarship?

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. North follows:]

**HELPING DISTRICT STUDENTS ACHIEVE SUCCESS:
REVIVING THE D C OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

**Ms. Betty J. Fenwick- North Testimony
The Preparatory School of the District of Columbia**

Hello, a distinguished member of the committee, my name is Betty J. Fenwick- North and I am the Founder of the Preparatory School of the District of Columbia.

The Preparatory School of the District of Columbia, Inc. licensed, non-profit, private educational institution. We opened our doors in 1984 as a Child Development Center, and over the last 26 years as a result of the needs of our parents and students, have expanded to where now we educate students up to the tenth grade.

Our mission is to give our students the academic foundation that will allow them to be successful in life, in a safe, caring and structured environment that utilizes small class size learning. We provide the intimate attention that a lot of today's youth require in order to reach the educational aptitude necessary for success. Our wonderful staff is able to adapt to each student's unique cognitive learning style while placing emphasis on analyzing, reading, language articulation, and writing. In addition to academics, it is the aim of The Preparatory School of DC to assist with character building, developing the ability to persevere, integrity, and respect for themselves and their community.

The Preparatory School of DC is a "family first" school. We strive to instill good family values in each of our students. A majority of our students come from low income large families. A number of our families have multiple children close who are school age and would not have the opportunity to

receive an educational from a private school if it were not for the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has made it possible for many low income families to have more options in achieving a quality education. Over 150 students have been able to attend the Preparatory School of DC solely because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program and opportunity that has provided a sound and enriching educational experience. Students who attend The Preparatory School of DC range from those taking AP course level work; to the students that have been diagnose with learning disabilities, as well as those with documented disciplinary problems that have involved the courts. And as many parents if they were able to testify would tell you and we continually hear first hand; if it were not for the Opportunity Scholarship Program many of these students would not have been able to experience and discover that they are not just a number or a statistic; they are individuals with needs that can and will be met.

Today's children are our future, let us help you guide them, and prepare them for the next level. The more options we provide these students and their families the better choices they can make for their situations and the better choices they make the better their chances of success.

In closing I would like to say that I believe The Opportunity Scholarship has open doors for parents to have choices for their children education; has empowered parents without the necessary financial resources to be more involved and influential in the children's education; and, the Opportunity Scholarship has provided student access and exposure to experiences and an academic culture that private religious and secular schools offer.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Ms. North.
We will recognize Dr. Edelin for her 5 minute opening statement.

STATEMENT OF RAMONA EDELIN

Ms. EDELIN. Thank you, Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Davis, Congresswoman Norton, other members of the committee. I am Ramona Edelin, executive director of the D.C. Association of Chartered Public Schools, the membership organization that represents the interest of public charter schools in D.C. I am honored to come before you today to share the progress and the promise of public charter schools in Washington, DC.

You may be well aware that the U.S. Congress helped to create the environment for charter schools in D.C. with the passage of the School Reform Act of 1995. The number of students enrolled in D.C. charter schools has grown steadily from a few hundred students in 1996 to one of the largest concentrations in any city in the country. Currently, our charter schools serve about 28,000 students, which comprises 38 percent of all of the public school children; and this number is expected to increase in the fall.

D.C. charter schools serve students of all ages and abilities, from 3 years old to adult learners. During the 2009–10 school year, 87 percent of charter school students were African-American, 9 percent were Latino, 3 percent were Caucasian, 65 percent were low income, 10 percent were special needs students, and 3 percent were English language learners.

Families in Washington, DC, have the choice to choose from 52 unique programs at 93 locations throughout the city. Offerings include school programs focusing on bilingual immersion; math, science and technology; the performing arts; public policy; character and leaders; Latin and the classics; virtual and online learning; media arts; Montessori; college prep; and a boarding program; among many other options.

Every charter school offers open enrollment to any D.C. resident, regardless of their neighborhood or previous academic achievement. Spaces are available on a first-come, first-served basis; and when there are more students interested in a school than there are spaces available, charter schools must hold a lottery so that every student has an equal opportunity for those spaces.

The D.C. Public Charter School Board, the city's independent charter authorizer, recently accepted 19 applications to open new charter schools for fall of 2012. Although parent interest and demand remain high, the growth in charter school opportunities may have begun to plateau. There are fewer waiting lists now than there were in years past; however, several of our schools still have hundreds of students on their waiting lists.

Charter school performance and accountability from the beginning was clear that the greater autonomy afforded charter schools came with a price of greater accountability for performance. We see the evidence of what these charter school options have meant: the students that would otherwise be restricted to their neighborhood schools. We have seen students come from one, two, or three grade levels behind in one school year. We have seen students excel far beyond their grade level and take part in experiences they never imagined possible.

We have heard testimony from young African-American and Latino male students who have said they would not be alive, much less graduating from high school and going on to college with tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships. Every June we witness at least 90 percent of the seniors at Thurgood Marshall Academy in Southeast; Washington Math, Science & Technology, Friendship Collegiate and Cesar Chavez in Northeast; and Maya Angelou and Hospitality in Northwest graduate from high school.

Last year, more than 750 students accepted more than \$15 million in college scholarships. Many of them were the first in their families to go to college and many took with them more than \$100,000. These are statistics we can support and perpetuate for generations to come.

I see my time running out, so I will point out that there are consequences to lack of performance. This is mentioned in my written testimony. I would like to mention, before closing, that under the able leadership of our new mayor, Vincent Gray, we are now coming together as one city to leverage the strengths and address the weaknesses of both sectors of public education in this city as a whole. These are an array of life-changing options, and performance accountability going along with it, that we certainly hope this Congress will choose to continue to support.

Thank you for the opportunity to share.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Edelin follows:]

TESTIMONY OF DR. RAMONA EDELIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, D.C. ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2011

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, CENSUS
AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
PUBLIC HEARING ON
DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN GOUDY, MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM, AND OTHER ASSEMBLED
POLICY MAKERS AND GUESTS. MY NAME IS DR. RAMONA EDELIN. I AM
THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DC ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED
PUBLIC SCHOOLS, A MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION THAT REPRESENTS THE
INTERESTS OF WASHINGTON, DC'S PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS. I AM
HONORED TO COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO SHARE THE PROGRESS AND
THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON, DC.

HISTORY AND GROWTH OF DC CHARTER SCHOOLS

YOU MAY BE WELL AWARE THAT THE U.S. CONGRESS HELPED TO CREATE
THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS IN DC WITH THE PASSING OF
THE SCHOOL REFORM ACT OF 1995. THERE WAS ADMITTEDLY SOME
INITIAL LOCAL RESISTANCE TO THIS REFORM APPROACH BUT IN THE 16
YEARS SINCE THE LEGISLATION, LOCAL POLICY MAKERS, COMMUNITIES,
EDUCATORS AND PARENTS HAVE MADE CHARTER SCHOOLS A THRIVING
AND POPULAR COMPONENT OF THE CITYWIDE EFFORT TO IMPROVE
PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR ALL DC STUDENTS. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN DCCHARTER SCHOOLS HAS GROWN STEADILY FROM A FEW
HUNDRED STUDENTS IN 1996 TO ONE OF THE LARGEST CONCENTRATIONS
IN ANY CITY IN THE COUNTRY. CURRENTLY, DC CHARTER SCHOOLS
SERVE ABOUT 28,000 STUDENTS, WHICH COMPRISES 38% OF THE PUBLIC

SCHOOL POPULATION; THIS NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE THIS FALL.

DC CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVE STUDENTS OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES, FROM 3 YEAR OLDS TO ADULT LEARNERS. DURING THE 2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR, 87% OF CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS WERE AFRICAN-AMERICAN, 9% WERE LATINO, AND 3% WERE CAUCASIAN; 65% WERE LOW-INCOME, 10% WERE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS, AND 3% WERE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

FAMILIES IN WASHINGTON DC HAVE THE OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM 52 UNIQUE PROGRAMS AT 93 LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE CITY. OFFERINGS INCLUDE SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOCUSING ON BILINGUAL IMMERSION, MATH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, THE PERFORMING ARTS, PUBLIC POLICY, CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP, LATIN AND THE CLASSICS, VIRTUAL AND ONLINE LEARNING, MEDIA ARTS, MONTESSORI, COLLEGE PREP, AND A BOARDING PROGRAM, AMONG MANY OTHER OPTIONS. EVERY CHARTER SCHOOL OFFERS OPEN ENROLLMENT TO ANY DC RESIDENT, REGARDLESS OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD OR PREVIOUS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. SPACES ARE AVAILABLE ON A FIRST-COME-FIRST-SERVED BASIS AND WHEN THERE ARE MORE STUDENTS INTERESTED IN A SCHOOL THAN THERE ARE SPACES AVAILABLE, CHARTER SCHOOLS MUST HOLD A LOTTERY SO THAT EVERY STUDENT HAS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE SPACES. THE DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD, THE CITY'S INDEPENDENT CHARTER AUTHORIZER, RECENTLY ACCEPTED 19 APPLICATIONS TO OPEN NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR FALL 2012. ALTHOUGH PARENT INTEREST AND DEMAND REMAIN HIGH, THE GROWTH IN CHARTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES HAS BEGUN TO MEET DEMAND, SUCH THAT THERE ARE FAR FEWER WAITING LISTS NOW THAN THERE WERE IN YEARS PAST.

CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

FROM THE BEGINNING, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE GREATER AUTONOMY AFFORDED CHARTER SCHOOLS CAME WITH THE PRICE OF GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERFORMANCE.

WE SEE THE EVIDENCE OF WHAT THESE CHARTER SCHOOL OPTIONS HAVE MEANT TO STUDENTS THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE RESTRICTED TO THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS. WE HAVE SEEN STUDENTS COME FROM ONE, TWO OR THREE GRADE LEVELS BEHIND IN ONE SCHOOL YEAR. WE HAVE SEEN STUDENTS EXCEL FAR BEYOND THEIR GRADE LEVEL AND TAKE PART IN EXPERIENCES THEY NEVER IMAGINED POSSIBLE. WE HAVE HEARD TESTIMONY FROM YOUNG, AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO MALE STUDENTS WHO HAVE SAID THEY WOULD NOT BE ALIVE, MUCH LESS GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND GOING ON TO COLLEGE WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN SCHOLARSHIPS. EVERY JUNE WE WITNESS AT LEAST 90% OF THE SENIORS AT THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY IN SE, WASHINGTON, MATH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, FRIENDSHIP COLLEGIATE AND CESAR CHAVEZ IN NE, AND MAYA ANGELOU AND HOSPITALITY HIGH IN NW GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL. LAST YEAR MORE THAN 750 STUDENTS ACCEPTED MORE THAN 15 MILLION DOLLARS IN SCHOLARSHIPS; MANY OF THEM WERE THE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILIES TO GO TO COLLEGE AND MANY TOOK WITH THEM MORE THAN \$100,000. THESE ARE STATISTICS WE CAN SUPPORT AND PERPETUATE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

WHILE IT'S FINE TO CELEBRATE THE GOOD NEWS, WE DON'T EXPECT ANYONE IN THIS CITY TO BELIEVE WE HAVE ACHIEVED ALL WE CAN. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL OPERATIONS ARE CONTINUOUSLY EVALUATED, BEST PRACTICES ARE SHARED AND SCHOOLS THAT ARE MEDIOCRE OR UNDER-PERFORMING ARE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO MEASURE UP TO INCREASINGLY HIGH STANDARDS AT THE LOCAL AND

NATIONAL LEVELS. CHARTER SCHOOLS THAT FAIL TO MEET THE STANDARDS WILL BE CLOSED BY THE DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD. IN FACT, TWENTY-FOUR CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE CLOSED SINCE 1998. THE DC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD CONTINUES TO REFINE ITS ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM AND HAS RECENTLY BEGUN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK THAT WILL ENABLE BOARD MEMBERS TO EVALUATE CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AGAINST COMMON MEASURES. IT WILL BETTER ENABLE ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS AND WILL DRIVE EVEN GREATER ACHIEVEMENT FOR STUDENTS.

UNDER THE ABLE LEADERSHIP OF OUR NEW MAYOR, VINCENT GRAY, WE ARE NOW COMING TOGETHER AS ONE CITY TO LEVERAGE THE STRENGTHS AND ADDRESS THE WEAKNESSES OF BOTH SECTORS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THIS CITY, AS A WHOLE. WE ARE CURRENTLY AT THE PLACE WHERE THERE ARE MANY, MANY EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR DC FAMILIES. OUR ONGOING WORK WILL BE TO ENSURE THAT EVERY SCHOOL FITS THAT DESCRIPTION AND THAT PARENTS HAVE THE PROBLEM OF TOO MANY GREAT CHOICES.

THE ARRAY OF OPTIONS, THE LIFE-CHANGING OUTCOMES AND THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY THAT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE AS A RESULT OF DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IS AN HISTORICAL ACHIEVEMENT OF WHICH WE WILL SEE BENEFITS FOR GENERATIONS TO COME. WE THANK THE CONGRESS FOR ITS ONGOING SUPPORT OF THIS PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM AND CELEBRATE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESSES IT HAS AFFORDED RESIDENTS OF THIS CITY.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH YOU THE PROGRESS
AND THE PROMISE OF DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS. I AM HAPPY TO
ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Dr. Edelin.

Mr. Chavous, you were clear, but I want to give you another chance to be absolutely clear so we can shatter this facade that supporting the OSP diverts public moneys away from the public school system and the charter school system. In your opening statement you addressed that. Can you do it one more time? Does this program divert any money from the public school system or the charter school system?

Mr. CHAVOUS. No, it does not. When we were in discussions about this program, there were a couple of things that are relevant to that question. One is we wanted to make sure that we lifted all boats. We recognized that we had to proceed on two tracks; that while D.C. public schools were struggling and the D.C. charter school movement was improving, we wanted to make sure that this Federal partnership, this unique Federal partnership provided funding for those two sectors at the same time that we provided money for the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

We also recognized the argument that some people were making that it would take money away. So we held D.C. public schools harmless. So for every child that they lost that went to the program, they still got the per pupil funding dollars to D.C. public school. So at the end of the day they did not lose dollars when this program was started.

Mr. GOWDY. Which raises the very interesting question that my colleague from Illinois, Representative Walsh, asked this morning, which is who are the opponents of this program and what is their motivation? And I know I am asking you to assign motives to other people, but you have an experience with this program in the District of Columbia that some of us do not. So if it not going to divert money and the parents want it and the students want it, where is the opposition?

Mr. CHAVOUS. Well, one other thing about diversion of money, at the end of the day, the students will be forced to go back to D.C. public schools, it would add money to the bottom line. We have to be mindful of that. And in terms of the opposition, look, people don't know what they don't know, and there is a lot of fear, and there is a lot of other interests, to me, that trump the interests of what is best for individual children; there is politics, there is socioeconomic dynamics, there is this notion of supporting only what we know, what we are used to.

I am of a mind, and I took this position when I became a public official chairing the Education Committee on the Council, that I would support anything that would help a child or a group of children learn; anything. Because, at the end of the day, when we have an achievement gap in this country between African-American children and children of color and white children that over 30 years has yet to be closed, in spite of all the investment we have put into education, we have to proceed on those two tracks.

On the one track we need to do what we can to improve our public schools, our traditional public schools so that all children benefit, but, on the other hand, we need to make sure that these individual children, like the two you heard from earlier today, that they have a shot at this piece of American pie.

And I am struck by the testimony, when we had a hearing, a City Council hearing on the voucher proposal, scholarship proposal, when I was on the Council several years ago, by a woman who testified who said she had one child—she said, Mr. Chavous, we have seen you hire some of these new superintendents, and when you hired the previous superintendent my oldest son was entering seventh grade and the superintendent said they needed 3 to 5 years.

Well, the schools didn't get better and I lost my oldest son because he was in a bad school. Now my youngest son is about to enter seventh grade and you have another new superintendent saying, give us another 3 to 5 years. I need this program for that reason, because I need help with my child today.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you.

Dr. Edelin, I want to commend you on the work you have done with the charter school system and again apologize for my lack of familiarity with all things District of Columbia, but there were opponents to that program when it began too, weren't there?

Ms. EDELIN. Yes, sir, there were some opponents to that program, and one of the reasons was that home rule and respect for local political and policy leaders and educators in D.C. seemed to have been abrogated by some of the earlier proponents who went over their heads and went out of their way, in some instances, to speak disrespectfully to and about them, and came to the Congress; and that did result in some resentment among the local people in D.C., political figures, policy figures, and educators to the fact of the way that it was done.

I am happy to say that today much of that early resentment has been ameliorated because the successes are so stunning in some of our schools with the same population of young people everybody in the country is so desperately concerned about. That achievement gap has been removed. Those young people do have new chances in a public school setting, a public charter school setting.

Mr. GOWDY. Mr. Wolf, my time is up, so I am going to ask the question as quickly as I can, and you can answer quickly or not, if you want. My colleague this morning cited another example of an elected official who was given the opportunity, responsibility to make a decision for his children. And I am not going to name any names, but lots of high ranking government officials, including Members of Congress, have to make the decision on private school, public school, home school. Why should that only be a decision that rich folk get to make?

Ms. NORTH. Well, personally, I don't think that, as a parent, you should be able to make the decision where you want your child to go, and through the funding sources that a low income parent will be able to receive through the Opportunity Scholarship opens that door for them to make that same decision, that choice that he made, where his child can go.

Mr. GOWDY. All right, thank you.

I will now recognize the distinguished gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and let me thank each one of our witnesses. I find this discussion to be quite intriguing. I have always believed and have always understood that the greatest equalizer that has ever existed in this country is some-

thing called public education, that public education is the greatest equalizer that has existed in this country.

Mr. Chavous, I am very familiar with your record. I have watched you and observed your work as you were a member of the D.C. Council. I have also been aware of your work in terms of national education reform and the efforts to provide opportunities outside even the District of Columbia, and I commend you for it.

As a matter of fact, I was at one of the schools that you have been involved with 2 weeks ago and had a great time with the students and some of the faculty there. And let me agree with your point when you say that we don't have the will or the courage, because I think that the best way to really improve failing schools, especially schools that are underperforming, is to not only provide a certain amount of resource that they need, but also to promote something that I call serious parental and community involvement.

I have a school in my congressional district where just yesterday we honored the principal because they have something called a 90-90-90 school. All of the kids live in what is called the North Lawndale community. All of them, more than 90 percent of them, are not only low income, but 90 percent or more qualify for food subsidies and free breakfasts and subsidized lunch. They, right now, happen to be the best performing school in the State of Illinois. I used to live on the block where they are located, as a matter of fact. The houses on one side of the block were torn down to build the school. I lived in a house on the other side of the block.

Some of the fear that some of us have when you start talking about all of the different approaches to education, we don't want to diminish public education, because every person has to go through the public systems; they don't have any options about not going to the public systems. So I appreciate providing opportunities for some students. But I don't want to take away the effort to make sure that every student, no matter where he or she might live, have this opportunity for the best education that we can provide for them.

So when you talk about, Mr. Chairman, why some people might appear to be opposed, they are not opposed to education, but they are afraid that there might be some retraction, that there might be some going backward; that diminishing of focus on all to the benefit of the few or some may have a tendency to produce that kind of trend.

Do either one of you have any feeling about that?

Mr. CHAVOUS. First of all, ranking member, thank you so much for those comments and your work in terms of helping with schools in Chicago. You and I know about some of the things you have helped with for those children, and that is much appreciated.

On that point, this is the analogy I like to use. It pains me what I see happening not just in D.C. public schools, but traditional public schools around the country. We need to focus on that. But the analogy I use is the house on fire and we have to proceed on different tracks. There are firemen who have to go put that fire out and there are firemen who have to go inside that burning building and pull some of those kids out. And you know what? You may not pull everyone out of that building, but you are going to pull out as many as you can to stabilize the situation and to save lives.

The dire deficits of our children, particularly children of color in this country, particularly African-American men in this country, when some cities like the city I grew up in, Indianapolis, 80 percent of the Black boys in their high school drop out; in Baltimore it is 70 percent. Because of those deficits that exist, I think, yes, we have to put the fire out and do what we can to restore and improve our traditional public schools.

But by goodness, Mr. Ranking Member, we need to support any and all means that are going to educate even one child. And I don't care if it is charter schools, traditional public schools, if it is scholarship programs, if it is tax credits, if it is Magnet schools, if it is specialty schools. I don't care what it is. I really believe that by any means necessary should be by any means necessary when it comes to the children that we are trying to save. And that is my view.

And I tell you I think that these parents you hear from, they have that view, because when it comes to individual children and individual parents who want the best for their child or their children, they should not be penalized based on zip code. And I think, unfortunately, that is the reality.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Ms. NORTH. Mr. Davis, I must say that we, as—well, I guess speaking for the non-public school sector, we do ask for and get assistance from the D.C. public schools through the Federal entitlement for the kids who attend our schools. So, in return, because some of the service, because we are small and private, that we can't provide these students, we are still getting assistance through the D.C. public school.

So we are not saying that we don't need the D.C. public schools; we are just saying that we need each other. We need each other to find out how and ways of bringing our children and raising our children as a community, and not just sometimes as an individual; we have to do it as a group. And through this effort all of us can make it possible for some children. And like he said, we might not get all of the kids, but the kids that we do provide the services for, we try to do the best that we can at those given times.

Thank you.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Chairman, can I briefly address the ranking member's question?

Mr. GOWDY. Sure.

Mr. WOLF. Ranking Member Davis, there is a substantial amount of evidence that the pressure of competition from school choice programs actually leads traditional public schools to improve in response and generate positive outcomes for students, thus creating a rising tide that lifts all boats. So, really, the idea of expanding choice and improving public education is really a false choice. The two can, and often do, work in close tandem.

Ms. EDELIN. If I could also, Mr. Chairman, just quickly. The charter schools in D.C. explicitly, through our Association, seek to find out what works, for whom, under what conditions, and to share best practices with DCPS and with other urban public school systems around the country. That is one of our explicit goals, to benefit all of the children.

Mr. GOWDY. Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

I thank the gentleman and I would recognize now the gentleman from Arizona, Dr. Gosar.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes. Thank you very, very much.

I hear a common denominator here involving parents, and making that a success story. With that being said, Dr. Edelin, do you support the multi-prong aspect that is currently going on in D.C. wholeheartedly in the education of our children?

Ms. EDELIN. Dr. Gosar, I am here as executive director of the D.C. Association of Charter Public Schools and my message is about the charter schools here today.

Dr. GOSAR. When we are talking about the education of children and being science-based, outcomes are everything. Wouldn't we acknowledge that we have a fundamental mechanism that is actually working here, and wouldn't we want to acknowledge support for that scholarship type program?

Ms. EDELIN. We support everything that is working to bring a quality education to the children of D.C. The only evidence I can speak to directly is that of the charter public schools.

Dr. GOSAR. If you are trying to get results based from the charter schools, have you not reached out to the private schools to find out what is working for them?

Ms. EDELIN. Actually, I did. In my first year in this role, I reached out to the independent and private schools to find out how they do evaluation and assessment, because improving school quality is one of the primary pillars of the work with our Association. So I have reached out to them. I have also reached out to high performing DCPS schools and to other sources around the country for information about best practices.

Dr. GOSAR. Would you say, then, in a followup, that they are a success model?

Ms. EDELIN. That, I cannot attest to myself. I can attest to the quality of the charter schools myself. And I also have reached out to our public charter school board, the authorizer, to get data they can stand behind with respect to the excellence of the schools and the shortcomings of the schools. So I can speak to charter schools.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I am finding this frustrating because, as a dentist, I am working on the premise of treatments that work and repetitions. So I am frustrated by seeing the modalities of vertical learning, and not going horizontally to instill and work with parts of education systems that are working. And I find it frustrating that I see your educational model going vertical and not including those in the dialog horizontally with all the rest of the educators. Is that a fair assumption?

Ms. EDELIN. With all respect, sir, I would say no. I have reached out and I think the charter schools singularly seek collaboration in D.C. across all lines as far as quality and best practices are concerned. We have made every effort to form what I call a seamless collaboration across all the sectors so that all the children of D.C. can get the benefit of the best of what is known. It is not always reciprocated, but we will keep trying.

Dr. GOSAR. Last question for you. Have you benefited from the voucher system to the charter schools and has there been a financial, as well as educational, uplift based upon that program?

Ms. EDELIN. I am not aware of any financial implications for charter schools. I may be wrong about that, but I am not aware of any financial implications. And I have not been the recipient of, though I have asked, any best practices or any information about what is working with particular groups of people as we are sorting out within the charter schools with the express intention of sharing that information with all of the school systems involving our children.

There is a crisis in this country with children of color from impoverished backgrounds and their learning, and we are actively engaged in finding out what works and sharing it, and I cannot say that we have been the recipient of similar kind of outreach.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, have you not received \$104 million in regards to that because of the three-sector approach?

Ms. EDELIN. From the Federal funding?

Dr. GOSAR. Yes.

Ms. EDELIN. Over 3 years would that be a figure? I am not aware of 1 year's worth.

Dr. GOSAR. Since its inception.

Ms. EDELIN. I don't have that figure since its inception. I do know charter schools, as a part of the three-sector approach, have received funding at least for the 3-years I have been with the organization. Yes, sir, they have.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much.

I yield my time.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Dr. Gosar.

We will now recognize the gentlelady from the District of Columbia, Representative Holmes Norton.

Ms. NORTON. My questions are mainly directed to Dr. Wolf. I do want to thank everyone for your testimony, very important testimony for our record.

I want to correct the record, Mr. Chavous, where you said that somehow there was double funding, that D.C. public schools were held harmless. To the contrary. That money travels with the child, so if a child leaves the D.C. public school system and goes to a charter school, that per pupil funding goes to the charter school.

And that, Mr. Wolf, is the only circumstance in which competition occurs, because then the public schools are competing not only for the child, but for the same funding. That is not the case with private schools. There is no competition with private schools because you don't have that nexus of funding.

To my colleagues, I want to say the mantra on the other side that you have said to my constituents every child deserves a private school choice. If that is your view, why have you not brought a private school bill to the floor of the House so that every child, including the children in your district, can get a private school choice? Instead, you are ripping money from the public schools of the District of Columbia and of the United States of America.

Mr. Wolf, according to the Department of Education's final report on the Opportunity Scholarship Program, 2010 June, that is 2 months ago issued, "There was no evidence that the Opportunity Scholarship Program affected student achievement as measured by standardized reading and math tests." If that is the case, how can

you claim that education attainment was enhanced, given this official report from the government?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, educational attainment is distinct from educational achievement. Educational achievement refers to performance on assessments and test scores. Educational attainment refers to how far a child goes in the educational system, their attainment of years of schooling, their attainment of educational degrees. That is the important distinction.

Ms. NORTON. Well, I can understand that distinction, but you do understand—first let me say, do the children in the private school program take the same standardized tests as the students at DCPS?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, for purposes of our evaluation, they did take the same test. That was central to our evaluation.

Ms. NORTON. They did not take the same tests, performance tests that the children in the D.C. public schools have to take every year?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, they did initially; it was written into the law that we had to use the same assessments used by D.C. public schools at the year of enactment of the law, and that was the SAT-9. Later, DCPS changed and adopted a criterion reference test. But we continue to administer the specified test to both the OSP students and the control—

Ms. NORTON. Well, the answer to my question is no, they do not take and have not taken the same standardized tests. The charter schools do take the same standardized tests. So when you hear comparisons, the comparisons I have made, those are real comparisons with real students and, indeed, with students who were often of a lower economic level than the students in the D.C. public schools.

Now, you say that there was, in your testimony, 12 percentage points higher graduation rates of students in the private schools from students in the public schools. Are you aware that the charter school students have a 25 percent better graduation rate than children in the D.C. public schools? How would you account for that difference?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, I am not familiar with that particular study, but one-third of the students in our control group were actually in D.C. charter schools, and they contributed to the overall average graduation rate of 70 percent for our control group. The OSP students, when you factor out those who never used their scholarships, graduated at a 91 percent rate.

Ms. NORTON. Figures don't lie and, if I was going to find a place for my kid, I would look at these figures very carefully. Could I ask you what percentage of children were sent back or left the private schools to return to the D.C. public schools?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, by the end of our evaluation, which was 6 years into the initial launch of the program, about half of the students offered scholarships in the first 2 years were still in a private schools.

Ms. NORTON. So there was a 50 percent dropout rate.

Mr. WOLF. That is correct, from the program, yes.

Ms. NORTON. What percentage of the students in the schools were from the lowest performing schools in the District of Columbia?

Mr. WOLF. Representative Norton, 44 percent of the students in the sample that we studied were attending schools in need of improvement at the point of applying to the OSP.

Ms. NORTON. So where were the rest from?

Mr. GOWDY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Thank you, Dr. Wolf.

We will now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. First of all, I want to thank all of you for your testimony.

Dr. Edelin, having served on a charter school board in my daughter's school, I have people come up to me quite often and ask about charter schools and should they start one, how do they start one, and I tell them that it is not a simple process and that they need to have certain elements on that board or else they are going to fail.

And I think a lot of people underestimate all that it takes. You have to have some business people; you have to have some fundraising people; you have to have some people who know that it is a corporation; you have to have some people who know something about education. So how do you all maximize the likelihood that your charter schools will be successful?

Ms. EDELIN. Thank you, Mr. Cummings.

Mr. CUMMINGS. And be brief, because I have a number of questions.

Ms. EDELIN. You are absolutely right. The D.C. Public Charter School Board has learned a lot in its 11-year life as the authorizer, and the processes for making application, going through the review process, having the public meetings, and having a charter agreement accepted or not have undergone great change based on precisely what you are saying. Governance is key. Fiscal management is absolutely crucial. These are all nonprofit organizations that enter into a contract with their authorizer, which is called a charter.

But there are lots of other parts, including getting right down to the curriculum and the scope and sequence, and who will be performing this work and what are the qualifications of the leadership, as well as those they will be bringing in to teach. It is very much a serious business.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Now, you heard Mr. Chavous, and, Mr. Chavous, I want to thank you for your testimony because it is very compelling. And I understand the individual; I understand everybody else too.

Dr. Edelin, when you hear the testimony of Mr. Chavous and you heard the testimony of the parents and the young people earlier, what do you say to them? I know you are here with regard to charter schools, but what do you say to them when Mr. Chavous says, you know, this kid—and I have used that argument myself, that this kid has one chance to be in the first grade, this is it, and one chance to be in the second grade; and if they fail to get what they need, it is not just for that moment, but it is for a lifetime that

they can be held back. So what do you say to that? I am just curious.

Ms. EDELIN. I say that in the District of Columbia we have 53 charter schools on 93 campuses that are working very, very hard every day to provide a quality education for every child that can get in. I do realize that not every child gets in in a given year, but our chances of growing and our viability and our sustainability create enormous potential, and I am doing everything, Mr. Cummings, in my power to make them the best schools they can possibly be.

Mr. CUMMINGS. So we have waiting lists at most of those schools?

Ms. EDELIN. Actually, we do not have waiting lists at most of those schools at this moment in time; we have had. But we are now beginning just about to plateau. There are some schools that have hundreds of students on the waiting lists, but, for the most part, it is not the case that most of our charter schools have waiting lists right now. There is room in charter schools for most of the children in D.C. to get a good public school education.

Mr. CUMMINGS. There is no doubt about it that parental involvement is very significant in any school in the achievement of young people. At the charter school where our kids went, there was a requirement that each parent had to volunteer at least something like 70 hours per year. That is a lot of time, and the kids had a real advantage in having a Congressman because I taught politics, so they got a course in politics and law. But I am just wondering do you have those kinds of requirements in—

Ms. EDELIN. Many of the charter schools ask parents to sign a pledge of commitment, and the students as well, because creating a culture in a building is key to its success. I can't say, though, Mr. Cummings, I have known any child or parent to be dismissed from a school for failure to do that, but there is an expectation there, a very high standard there that they are asked to buy into, yes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Just one quick thing. I would suggest that you all take a look at that, because I found, Mr. Chairman, that involvement is so significant. I mean, having parents in the school makes a humongous, I mean, just a tremendous difference. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GOWDY. Thank you, Mr. Cummings. It might be well if you would go teach politics and law at all the schools in all of our jurisdictions. I, for one, would love to have you in South Carolina.

We will now recognize the distinguished gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Clay.

Mr. CLAY. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for conducting this hearing. I would also like the ranking member to come to my district to teach politics too.

Let me talk about my district first, Missouri, the St. Louis public schools. Right now a debate is raging in the Missouri legislature about private school vouchers and just how much we take from public schools to create these private school vouchers. And we can get into the issue of whether that is fair or not; whether it is a viable option for parents and students, and we can talk about that if we have time. But I know it would take thousands of dollars from each students and would have a devastating effect on the St. Louis public schools.

Let me start off with Dr. Edelin. Thank you for your excellent testimony regarding the history and growth of D.C. charter schools. I am interested in several parts of your testimony. One is, doctor, can you give us your assessment and examples of graduation rates at some of the area charter schools?

Ms. EDELIN. Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Clay. And I did include some of that in the testimony. What I did was average it out in some of our schools in every sector of the city, Southeast, Northeast, Northwest. We have at least 90 percent. But I want you to know that some of those schools are as high as 96 and 97 percent, well above the national average of high school graduation, and going to school with millions of dollars in college scholarships.

Mr. CLAY. OK, so they do go on to college.

Ms. EDELIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. CLAY. And they are prepared for college. How are the reading levels and the math levels?

Ms. EDELIN. This is something I would like to make very clear. The District of Columbia has some excellent traditional public schools, particularly in the affluent wards. We also have schools that are selective in that you have to audition and you have to have a certain grade point average in order to get in. But if you take those off the table, the affluent schools and the selective schools, and you just look at the schools that serve poor children of color, the charter schools outperform DCPS two to one with respect to reading and math by the time they get to middle and high school.

Mr. CLAY. And you know that through the assessment?

Ms. EDELIN. The only thing we have to go by is the year-end tests. I don't think that is adequate. I personally am a proponent of looking at growth gains in children, and I hope that the ESEA reauthorization will look more at growth gains, but right now that is all we have to look at, yes.

Mr. CLAY. Now, would you be able to supply the committee with statistics on matriculation and college acceptance?

Ms. EDELIN. Yes, sir. I would be happy to. I can't do it here and now, but I would be happy to, yes, sir.

Mr. CLAY. I know. In writing. We would appreciate it.

Ms. EDELIN. Certainly.

Mr. CLAY. Let me ask Mr. Chavous. Tell me about how D.C. charter schools stack up to D.C. public schools. If you had to choose one or the other for your children, which one would it be?

Mr. CHAVOUS. Well, what I did for my children was looked at individual schools. I wasn't focused on the system, or private versus public, as much as what fit the best educational needs of my individual children. And I think that is what parents look to have happen for them as well.

Traditionally, I hear all this talk about charter schools. I have to say, parenthetically, that scholarships and vouchers are charter schools' best friends, because when I was chairing the Education Committee and I started charter schools or helped push charter school funding, I was getting worn out by a lot of people who now are talking about charter schools like they are doing great work. And I think that is progress because people now understand that providing options and choice matters.

I think, as Dr. Edelin knows, charter schools have generally outperformed D.C. public schools across the board. But at the end of the day, when it comes down to parents having choices, you know, in this global, multifaceted, technological age, we need to give more choices to parents, not less. More matters. I mean, this is a situation where we need to recognize that children respond to different learning modalities.

But the problem is that rubs us against our historical perspective where we are locked into this one-size-fits-all paradigm that is a cookie cutter approach that you matriculate a certain way according to age and divide it according to class size and all this stuff. Well, at the end of the day, the learning that we know is going to take place over the next 20, 30 years, is going to be wholly unlike anything any of us in this room can relate to.

So, to answer your question, I think charter schools are generally done well because they look at things more with a forward lens and is more innovative and creative in its output. And in terms of how it relates to this hearing, that is why we promoted this three-sector strategy, so that we would have a whole host of options for parents to choose from.

Mr. CLAY. OK, thank you for your response.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GOWDY. Yes, sir. I thank the gentleman.

On behalf of all of us, I want to thank this panel for your professionalism, for your expertise, frankly, for your collegiality toward one another and toward this subcommittee.

We will be adjourned.

And I would ask the four if you can linger for about 30 seconds; I know some of us would like to come thank you in person.

This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:14 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[The prepared statements of Hon. Dan Burton and Hon. Elijah E. Cummings follow:]

**Opening Statement
Rep. Dan Burton
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
CENSUS AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
MARCH 1, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing about the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, specifically the prospects for its future and Speaker Boehner's legislation, H.R. 471, that reauthorizes this groundbreaking school choice program in our Nation's capital, which has provided educational opportunities for thousands of inner-city children since it was established with bipartisan support in 2004. I am proud to be a cosponsor of the bill.

I believe that school choice initiatives can bring the promise of freedom, opportunity, and hope to thousands of children trapped in failing schools across the Nation. The idea of school choice is nothing new. Families with the financial means have nearly endless choices to send their children to private schools from kindergarten through college. Since 1972, the Federal government's Pell Grant Program provides school choice through need-based

grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post-baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education. For decades, the G.I. Bill has provided financial assistance to eligible military personnel to attend the public or private college of their choice.

If we agree that giving low-income students a choice in higher education is a good idea and a good use of Federal money, then why not help children from low-income families attend the elementary or secondary school of their choice?

Academic performance in the District of Columbia Public Schools was dismal consistently ranking near or at the bottom of national standards, with a few exceptions. In an effort to provide alternatives to the District's many failing schools, in 2003, Congress enacted the first Federally funded, private school voucher program in the country.

Many opponent then and now will say that such a program takes money away from public schools. That is not the case in any way shape

or form with this program which has become to be known as the DC Scholarship Program. As part of a three-sector approach to school improvement in the District, in addition to authorizing and appropriating \$14 million for the scholarship voucher program, Congress provided \$13 million for the District Public Schools System for school improvement, and \$13 million to expand charter schools in the District.

Since 2004, the District's public schools have improved in student achievement. That's encouraging and a trend I hope will continue. Unfortunately, a long road lies ahead for District of Columbia's public schools. The necessary improvements in teacher performance and student achievement will take a great deal of time, and unless the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program is reauthorized now, hundreds of additional students will not be able to benefit from the program.

At this time, only students currently receiving a scholarship are allowed to continue in the

program; no new students are eligible. This was done at the insistence of the Democrats in Congress working in concert with President Obama. Time and time again has shown that opponents of school choice don't send their children to public schools. President Obama and his wife selected a private school that costs in the neighborhood of \$32,000 a year.

Today's hearing is the first step in Congress reviving the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, which is exactly what Speaker Boehner's bill, H.R. 471 does. It builds upon the successes of the original authorization and improves upon the program by making several improvements in areas where needed. To the opponents of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, I emphasize once again that no funding will be diverted from the public schools because H.R. 471 continues the three-sector approach to school reform. Funding would be equally divided between the DC public schools, DC public charter schools, and the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program.

I support helping low-income students in the early years of their education as well as at the college level. Doing anything less means we're leaving a child behind. I look forward to hearing what our witnesses have to say about the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, the District's public schools and charter schools.

Thank you.

Opening Statement
Congressman Elijah E. Cummings
Hearing on “The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Keeping the Door Open”
March 1, 2011

Thank you Chairman Gowdy and Ranking
Member Davis.

Improving public education, whether in an urban, suburban, or rural setting, is a truly arduous task. It takes time, money, vision, support, and accountability. But most importantly, it takes the unfettered belief of communities and dedicated educational professionals that all children can learn and are deserving of a high-quality education.

Coming from the great city of Baltimore, I also understand first-hand the complexities of transforming struggling inner city schools. About three years ago, I became deeply involved in turning around one of my own neighborhood schools. I discovered that the school lacked adequate classroom space and educational amenities. After sustained action by the City of Baltimore, the Public School System, neighborhood activists, and myself, the school has made a near complete “180”, moving into a real school building and improving student academic performance.

I have also seen firsthand the astounding heights to which our public schools can soar. I serve as a board member of KIPP Baltimore – a public charter school – whose 8th grade students boast the third highest scores in Maryland on math, and the highest scores among Baltimore schools for both reading and math on the Maryland School Assessment. I was impressed by KIPP’s ability to deliver quality education in an urban public school setting, and I continue to be amazed by the school’s commitment to achievement.

As an advocate for quality education for all, and as a father, I recognize that all parents want what is best for their children, and that a combination of preparation and opportunity is critically important to enable kids to reach their God-given potential -- especially low-income, inner-city kids.

The District's elected leaders, school officials, community advocates, parents, and residents understand this. And over the past several years, I have observed their commitment to improving the quality of education in this city. There have been some transformational gains in the District's public education system. Since 2003, scores for District public school students in fourth grade have increased significantly, by as much as 15 points. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, the District's improvement is the second-greatest in the nation when compared to other large urban areas.

The District is also the only major city to see double-digit growth in both its reading and math scores for secondary students over the last three years.

The District's recent educational reforms have ushered in learning innovations, revamped curriculums, and focused on specialized projects, such as Payne Elementary's Catalyst World Culture and Linguistic program and Banneker High School's Advancement Placement and International Baccalaureate Diploma program.

The District has also enhanced alternative public educational options that could potentially be expanded with additional support. Like the city of Baltimore, the District is home to a multitude of thriving public charter schools, like Achievement Preparatory Academy, a middle school in the heart of southeast that has consistently made adequate yearly progress in both reading and math. The high school graduation rate for District public charter schools is eight percent higher than the U.S. national average.

To that end, I look forward to this morning's hearing as a constructive discussion about whether the District's opportunity scholarship program, which awards scholarships to approximately one thousand students to attend private and religiously affiliated schools, is the optimal route for improving the academic performance and achieving the greatest possible impact.

I thank our witnesses for being here and congratulate our student witnesses for their notable accomplishments.

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