

EXPLORING STATE SUCCESS IN EXPANDING PARENT AND STUDENT OPTIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD,
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND THE WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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EXPLORING STATE SUCCESS IN EXPANDING PARENT AND STUDENT OPTIONS

**Wednesday, May 16, 2012
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
Committee on Education and the Workforce
Washington, DC**

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Duncan Hunter [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Hunter, Kline, Platts, Foxx, Kildee, Scott, McCarthy, Davis, and Woolsey.

Staff present: Katherine Bathgate, Deputy Press Secretary; James Bergeron, Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Heather Couri, Deputy Director of Education and Human Services Policy; Lindsay Fryer, Professional Staff Member; Krisann Pearce, General Counsel; Mandy Schaumburg, Education and Human Services Oversight Counsel; Dan Shorts, Legislative Assistant; Alex Sollberger, Communications Director; Linda Stevens, Chief Clerk/Assistant to the General Counsel; Alissa Strawcutter, Deputy Clerk; Brad Thomas, Senior Education Policy Advisor; Tylease Alli, Minority Clerk; Kelly Broughan, Minority Staff Assistant; Jamie Fasteau, Minority Deputy Director of Education Policy; Ruth Friedman, Minority Director of Education Policy; Kara Marchione, Minority Senior Education Policy Advisor; Megan O'Reilly, Minority General Counsel; Julie Peller, Minority Deputy Staff Director; and Laura Schifter, Minority Senior Education and Disability Advisor.

Chairman HUNTER. Good morning. A quorum being present, now more than a few of us here, the subcommittee will come to order. Good morning, and welcome to today's subcommittee hearing.

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today. We appreciate the opportunity to get your perspective on the importance of parental engagement.

As a father, I know that my children don't stop learning just because the school day has ended. In fact, the majority of what they learn they learn at home with their mother and I.

We have a responsibility as parents to continue to challenge our kids outside the classroom. Parents who make a concerted effort to promote reading, help with homework, and discuss school with their children can inspire a better overall education experience.

We know increased parental engagement leads to higher grade point averages, better attendance, improved behavior and social skills, and a stronger interest in more challenging academic programs. Recognizing these positive results, many states are taking steps to ensure parents have additional opportunities to make decisions not only about where their children attend school but also about what happens during the school day.

Over the last 2 decades we have seen a strong surge in state efforts to expand access to high-quality charter schools, which is something members on both sides of the aisle have supported. Not only do charters present an opportunity for parents to choose the school that best meets their children's needs, many of these schools also help parents learn to play a more active role in their children's coursework and classroom activities.

Forty-one states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws to support charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools there were more than 5,200 charter schools in the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, some states have begun lifting arbitrary caps on the allowable number of charter schools, helping more students access these innovative institutions.

Like charter schools, private school scholarship programs also open doors to better education options. Here in Washington, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program continues to help disadvantaged students in the nation's capital escape failing schools.

The program is extremely successful, boasting a 91 percent graduation rate for scholarship students. Other states have adopted similar scholarship programs; roughly 81,000 students currently benefit from school scholarship programs underway in eight states, as well as D.C. and Douglas County, Colorado.

Two years ago my home state of California gained national attention for approving the nation's first parent trigger law, which allows parents to spur reform in underperforming public schools. Parent trigger laws give parents the ability to force change at their child's school by replacing some of the school's faculty or even obtaining a scholarship for their child to attend a private school.

In Compton, parents banded together to try and turn a struggling public elementary school into a charter school. Today, seven states have enacted their own distinct versions of a parent trigger law and more than 20 others have considered some variation of the law.

The fight to improve our nation's education system cannot happen in Washington, D.C. alone. It is critical states continue to lead the charge by engaging parents and providing options in the local education system.

I look forward to learning more about the state efforts to expand parental involvement and school choice options for our witnesses today, and I will now recognize my distinguished colleague, Dale Kildee, for his opening remarks.

[The statement of Mr. Duncan follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Duncan Hunter, Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

As a father, I know my children don't stop learning just because the school day has ended. We have a responsibility as parents to continue to challenge our kids outside the classroom. Parents who make a concerted effort to promote reading, help

with homework, and discuss school with their children can inspire a better overall education experience.

We know increased parental engagement leads to higher grade point averages, better attendance, improved behavior and social skills, and a stronger interest in more challenging academic programs. Recognizing these positive results, many states are taking steps to ensure parents have additional opportunities to make decisions not only about where their children attend school, but also about what happens during the school day.

Over the last two decades, we have seen a strong surge in state efforts to expand access to high-quality charter schools—which is something members on both sides of the aisle have supported. Not only do charters present an opportunity for parents to choose the school that best meets their children’s unique needs, many of these schools also help parents learn to play a more active role in their children’s coursework and classroom activities.

Forty-one states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws to support charter schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, there were more than 5200 charter schools in the 2010-2011 school year. Additionally, some states have begun lifting arbitrary caps on the allowable number of charter schools, helping more students access these innovative institutions.

Like charter schools, private school scholarship programs also open doors to better education options. Here in Washington, the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program continues to help disadvantaged students in the nation’s capital escape failing schools. The program is extremely successful, boasting a 91 percent graduation rate for scholarship students. Other states have adopted similar scholarship programs; roughly 81,000 students currently benefit from school scholarship programs underway in eight states, as well as D.C. and Douglas County, Colorado.

Two years ago, my home state of California gained national attention for approving the nation’s first “parent trigger” law, which allows parents to spur reform in underperforming public schools. Parent trigger laws give parents the ability to force change at their child’s school by replacing some of a school’s faculty, or even obtaining a scholarship for their child to attend a private school. In Compton, parents banded together to try to turn a struggling public elementary school into a charter school. Today, seven states have enacted their own distinct versions of a parent trigger law, and more than 20 others have considered some variation of the law.

The fight to improve our nation’s education system cannot happen in Washington, D.C. alone. It is critical states continue to lead the charge by engaging parents and providing options in the local education system. I look forward to learning more about state efforts to expand parental involvement and school choice options from our witnesses today.

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

I also want to thank our witness panel for their participation in today’s hearing.

I believe parent engagement is an important part of education reform. I hope your insights bring us closer to our goal of providing a high-quality education for all students.

I can recall as a teacher at a PTA meeting or similar group that I grew as a teacher by talking to the parents. Parents have a lot of wisdom and they certainly know their own child very well—some more than others, but it is very important to engage the parents and learn from the parents what might be more helpful for their children.

While the American education system is one of the best in the world, the status quo is no longer acceptable. We must prepare our students to compete in a mobile society and a global economy.

This preparation begins at home. A parent is a child’s first and best teacher.

I can recall, actually myself, learning how to spell before I went to school from my mother, who had an eighth grade education. But there was another element there that the school sometimes can touch upon and use.

Research shows that when families are engaged in their child's education students are more likely to succeed in school. In order to effectively engage, parents must have access to meaningful information and data about their child's academic achievement.

Additionally, parents should be able to play an active decision-making role within a school. They should be informed about turnaround efforts in failing schools and be able to provide input and feedback.

Parent engagement is about more than school choice. Efforts to increase the availability of charter schools or to expand voucher programs are not guaranteed to result in stronger parent engagement or increased student outcomes.

Charter schools are not a real choice for some families, and in some places, for most families. They operate in only 40 states, so there is nothing like that in the other 10 states, so—and those who do exist are often located solely in urban school districts. That is quite the case in Michigan.

Vouchers divert funding away from public schools and have failed to demonstrate increased parent engagement or student achievement. As we explore strategies for comprehensive school reform, including parent engagement, we should never lose sight of our commitment to equal access for all students, not just those who receive a voucher or attend a charter school.

I want to thank the chairman again for calling today's hearing. I look forward to this discussion.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement of Mr. Kildee follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Dale E. Kildee, Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I also want to thank our witness panel for their participation in today's hearing. I believe parent engagement is an important part of education reform. I hope your insights bring us closer to our goal of providing a high quality education for all students.

While the American education system is one of the best in the world, the status quo is no longer acceptable. We must prepare our students to compete in a mobile society and global economy.

This preparation begins at home. A parent is a child's first and best teacher. We must empower parents to engage in their child's education.

Research shows that when families are engaged in their child's education, students are more likely to succeed in school.

In order to effectively engage, parents must have access to meaningful information and data about their child's academic achievement.

Additionally, parents should be able to play an active decision-making role within a school. They should be informed about turnaround efforts in failing schools and be able to provide input and feedback.

Parent engagement is about more than school choice.

Efforts to increase the availability of charter schools or to expand voucher programs are not guaranteed to result in stronger parent engagement or increased student outcomes.

Charter schools are not a real choice for most families around the country. They operate in only 40 states and are often located solely in urban school districts.

Vouchers divert funding away from public schools and have failed to demonstrate an increase in parent engagement or student achievement.

As we explore strategies for comprehensive school reform, including parent engagement, we should never lose sight of our commitment to equal access for all students. Not just those who receive a voucher or attend a charter school.

I want to thank the Chairman for calling today's hearing, and I look forward to the discussion. I yield back.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank the ranking member.

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

It is now my pleasure to introduce the distinguished panel of witnesses. Number one, first, the Honorable Kevin Chavous is a founding board member of the senior advisor—and senior advisor to the American Federation for Children. He heads the Chavous Group, an education consulting firm. He has served as a member of the Council of the District of Columbia and chair of the Council's Education Committee, where he helped shepherd the charter school movement into the nation's capital.

Mr. Todd Ziebarth is the vice president for state advocacy and support at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Mr. Ziebarth has helped numerous states enact laws to better support high-quality public charter schools. He has also authored many national and state level research and policy publications related to key charter school issues.

Dr. Maria Fletcher is president of the New York State Parent Teacher Association. She is also an associate professor in the department of nursing at St. Joseph's College, in New York, and the coordinator of graduate programs where she teaches in both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

And lastly, Ms. Gwendolyn—I will try to get this right—Eaddy-Samuel is the president of the Connecticut Parents Union. She is also a founder of the State of Black Connecticut Alliance and the Meriden Kids Walk Safe Coalition. Ms. Eaddy-Samuel, along with other parents and educational advocates, successfully introduced the so-called parent reform trigger law in Connecticut.

Before I recognize each of you to provide your testimony let me briefly explain our lighting system. When you start you will have 5 minutes; it is green. When you have 1 minute left it is yellow. And when you are out of time it turns red, at which point I would ask you to wrap up your remarks as best as you are able.

After everyone has testified members will each have 5 minutes to ask questions of you, the panel.

I would now like to recognize Mr. Chavous for 5 minutes?

**STATEMENT OF HON. KEVIN CHAVOUS, SENIOR ADVISOR,
AMERICAN FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN**

Mr. CHAVOUS. Thank you very much, Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, and members of the committee, particularly Congressman Scott, who I have known for many years.

Good to see you again. I knew you when I had hair and yours was a different color, let's say.

Thank you for the invitation to testify today. As a long-time supporter of parental choice and empowerment I am pleased that Congress is interested in delving deeper into this issue. I do have some prepared remarks that you have for the record and I will summarize them and then I look forward to the questions.

As you mentioned, I am a founding member and senior advisor to—founding board member of the American Federation for Children, which is the nation’s leading advocacy organization promoting parental school choice. AFC works to promote the benefits of and the need for school choice via vouchers or opportunity scholarship, scholarship tax credits, and education savings account programs.

We also strongly support all forms of parental choice, including public school choice, charter schools, and virtual schools, homeschooling, magnet schools—anything that is going to help a child learn, we support them.

Ultimately, we seek to advance public policy that empowers parents, particularly those low-income families, so that they can choose the education that they determine is best for their children. As a former member of the Council of the District of Columbia and chair of the Council’s Education Committee I was at the forefront of the growth of the charter school movement here in the District of Columbia, which now numbers over 40 percent of our public school kids being in charter schools, as well as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, a voucher program that allows low-income parents to choose the school that best fits for them.

Parental choice, to me, is the very definition of parental engagement. Choice empowers parents to decide what educational delivery system, be it the traditional public school, charter school, or private school, best meets the specific needs of their child. Choice programs all across the country show that parental engagement via school choice improves educational outcomes for participating students, puts students in safer schools, and gives parents more satisfaction with their child’s learning environment.

This powerful form of parental engagement is catching on nationwide. The 2011 and 2012 state legislative sessions have given rise to a large crop of new private school choice programs in a diverse sampling of states. Seven new private school choice programs were enacted in 2011 and two additional were signed into law already this year.

Fully one-third of the current 29 private school choice programs were enacted in the past year-and-a-half. Parents, education reformers, and state and local elected officials across the country are recognizing that parental choice makes sense for families in their states. One-third of the nation’s state legislative chambers passed school choice legislation creating new programs and expanding existing ones over the past 17 months.

Allow me to share a couple of highlights before I end my testimony. I am proud to say that I was able to play a role in helping to enact the 2008 Student Scholarship for Educational Excellence Program, the voucher program in New Orleans for low-income families and failing schools.

Four consecutive studies assessing parental satisfaction showed remarkably consistent and high praise from parents with children in this program, and no fewer than 93 percent of parents continued to be satisfied or very satisfied with their child’s voucher school. Just fewer than 2,000 students participate in the program, but recently this year the legislature expanded the program statewide, so

up to 400,000 students are eligible for this program beginning next year.

But the successes in Louisiana were made possible in part because of the prior work in many other states around the country, and in my testimony you see me talk about the Florida Tax Credit program, which was enacted in 2001, in which nearly 40,000 students participate. I am pleased to say that when this program was up for renewal a good portion of Democrats and Republicans supported that.

In addition, as you know, much of my work over the past 7 years has been related to the successful passage and implementation of the program here in D.C., the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. And I am proud to say that we are seeing similar successful outcomes with those children.

A 2010 study from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute on Educational Sciences found that the students who used the opportunity scholarship program here in D.C. had a graduation rate of 91 percent—21 percentage points higher than those who did not receive a scholarship. The D.C. voucher program is over 30 percent higher than the graduation rate of other D.C. public school students.

In 2009 the study determined that the program boosted student reading scores as the use of this scholarship increased reading achievement by an extra 3.7 months learning over 3 years. This program has been a success.

Since I am running out of time I will end my testimony now and look forward to the questions, but I think that part of this testimony is not just about the numbers, and part of this hearing is not about the numbers. It is about putting a face on the numbers. And I think that for that I look forward to the questions and answers and follow up because I could share personal stories and vignettes of children who benefited from choice programs that otherwise would have been lost.

[The statement of Mr. Chavous follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Kevin P. Chavous, Senior Advisor,
American Federation for Children**

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the invitation to testify today. As a long-time supporter of parental choice and empowerment, I am pleased that Congress is interested in delving deeper into this very important issue.

I am a founding board member and senior advisor to the American Federation for Children (AFC), the nation's leading advocacy organization promoting school choice. AFC works to promote the benefits of—and the need for—school choice via vouchers, scholarship tax credits, and education savings account programs. We are also strong supporters of public school choice, charter schools, as well as virtual schools, homeschooling, and magnet schools. Ultimately, we seek to advance public policy that empowers parents, particularly those in low income families, to choose the education they determine is best for their children. As a former member of the Council of the District of Columbia and Chair of the Council's Education Committee, I was at the forefront of the growth of the charter school sector here in D.C., as well as the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, a voucher program that allows low-income parents to choose the school that best fits their child's needs.

Parental choice is the very definition of parental engagement. Choice empowers parents to decide what educational delivery system—be it traditional public school, charter school, or private school—best meets the specific needs of their child. Choice programs all across the country show that parental engagement via school choice improves educational outcomes for participating students, puts students in safer

schools, and gives parents more satisfaction with their child's learning environments.

This powerful form of parental engagement is catching on in states nationwide. The 2011 and 2012 state legislative sessions have given rise to a large crop of new private school choice programs in a diverse sampling of states. Seven new private school choice programs were enacted in 2011, and two additional programs were signed into law already this year. Fully one third of the current 29 private school choice programs were enacted in the past year and a half. Parents, education reformers, and state and local elected officials across the country are recognizing that parental choice makes sense for families in their states. One third of the nation's state legislative chambers passed school choice legislation creating new programs and expanding existing ones over the past 17 months.

Allow me to share a few highlights about just a few of the many private school choice programs operating today:

Louisiana

I am proud to say that I was able to play a role in securing the 2008 enactment of the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, a voucher program in New Orleans for low-income families in failing schools. Four consecutive studies assessing parental satisfaction showed remarkably consistent and high praise from parents with children enrolled in the program, as no fewer than 93 percent of parents continued to be "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their child's voucher school.

Just fewer than 2,000 students participate in that program, but now, thanks to recent action by the state legislature and the governor, the highly-successful program has been expanded to the rest of the state. Our work with key legislators and the substantial grassroots groundwork done over a period of several years has resulted in making nearly 400,000 students eligible for the statewide program beginning next year, thanks to the strong bipartisan majority that approved the voucher expansion last month.

Florida Tax Credit Scholarship

But the successes in Louisiana were made possible in part because of the prior work in many other states around the country. Florida's Tax Credit Scholarship was enacted in 2001 and today serves nearly 40,000 students statewide. Thanks to donations from businesses and corporations, a nonprofit organization can provide scholarships for children in low-income families to attend the private school of their parents' choice. Students in the program come from families with an average household income of just over \$24,000, and over half of the participants are from single parent households. Some 34 percent of participants are African-American and another 34 percent are Hispanic.

The results have shown the program to be a resounding success. A state-commissioned researcher at Northwestern University found that scholarship students tended to be among the lowest-performing students in their prior public school, but once in the program they performed just as well or better on academic assessments than students nationally. It is important to note that these national comparisons pertain to all students nationally, and not just low-income students. In addition, the same researcher conducted another state sanctioned study that showed that the Florida program led to standardized test score gains in the public schools most likely to lose students to private schools. Through parental engagement for the state's most disadvantaged families, we are seeing improved academic outcomes for everyone. It's a reality that transcends party lines and ideological divides, as just last year, we saw 46 percent of the Florida Democratic legislative caucus vote to dramatically expand the program.

DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

Much of my work over the past seven years has been related to the successful passage and implementation of the program here in D.C., the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. And I'm proud to say that we're seeing similarly successful outcomes here in our nation's capital. A 2010 study from the U. S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences found that students who used opportunity scholarships graduated at a rate of 91 percent, 21 percentage points higher than those interested in the program who did not receive a scholarship. The D.C. voucher participant graduation rate is over 30 percent higher than the graduation rate of students in D.C. Public Schools. In 2009, the study determined that the program boosted student reading scores, as the use of a scholarship increased reading achievement by an extra 3.7 months of learning over three years. This program is truly an example of parents being intimately involved in their children's education and the long-term positive effects it can have on those children's lives. In fact, four consecutive studies from Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas

found that D.C. parents were very satisfied, more involved in their children's education, and becoming savvy educational consumers.

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

In developing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, much inspiration came from the nation's oldest and largest voucher program, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Enacted in 1990, it has grown from serving 337 students in its first year to now having more than 23,000 participating students during the 2011-12 school year. This form of parental empowerment in Milwaukee has also resulted in positive educational outcomes for participating students. A 2012 "gold standard" evaluation found that the on-time graduation rate for students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) was 7 percentage points higher than the graduation rate of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). The study also found that students participating in the Milwaukee voucher program are more likely than their public school peers to enroll in a four-year college and persist in college. The University of Arkansas researchers that have evaluated the program every year since 2008 examined "virtually every possible way that school choice could systematically affect people, schools, and neighborhoods in Milwaukee and found no evidence of any harmful effects of choice."

Let me share with you an example of how parental involvement is encouraged by private schools participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. One participating school, a faith-based elementary school, excels at providing opportunities for parents to get involved. At this school the parent attendance rate at parent teacher conferences is typically 100 percent. Parents are encouraged to get involved with school life, for example, by volunteering for lunchroom duty, supervising student clubs, assisting in the school library, helping to organize fundraisers such as the school auction, or serving on an advisory board known as the Education Committee. Parent volunteer hours are incentivized but not required. According to the principal of this school these opportunities for parent involvement all contribute to the development of a strong school culture that fosters academic growth.

Arizona's Education Savings Accounts

But if the aforementioned programs have done wonders to increase parental engagement, a new program enacted last year in Arizona has truly shifted the power of educational decision-making back into the hands of the parents. Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) were enacted in Arizona last year and will likely be seriously considered by other states in the future. These programs create personal accounts that store a child's state education dollars. These funds can be used for a variety of educational options, including private school tuition and fees, textbooks, tutoring, and even future college tuition payments. With ESAs, it is truly the parent who determines how state funding is spent for their children's education.

The first such program, Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Accounts, is in its very first year of implementation. This particular program is tailored to students who have a disability or who are eligible to receive special education services from a school district under state law. With this program, 90 percent of state funding for each qualified student is deposited in an account that the student's parents control. The overall amount takes into account each child's grade and disability. If there is leftover money in a child's account after high school, the funds can be used for post-secondary education. Nearly 150 students participated in the first year of the program, and the Arizona legislature recently passed a bill that expands eligibility for ESAs to students in D and F schools, children of active duty military, and children who have been in foster care and have either been adopted or permanently placed.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that there is now a wealth of evidence, from multiple scientifically valid studies to parental satisfaction rates to the personal testimony of the thousands of parents I've encountered across the country that shows without a doubt that private school choice leads to positive educational outcomes for students. The reason is that parents are often best suited to choose the schooling environment that best meets their child's needs. Parents across the country deserve the option of participating in the most powerful form of parental engagement: choosing where their child attends school every day.

States are increasingly recognizing this, as evidenced by the large number of new and expanded programs all over the country. No one knows an individual child and his or her learning styles better than a parent. We owe it to every parent to provide them with the tools that will allow their child to succeed. Through parental choice and expanded educational options nationwide, we can work towards finally living up to our promise to give children all across America access to the quality education they deserve.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Mr. Chavous.
And I would now like to recognize Ms. Eaddy-Samuel for 5 minutes?

Could you turn on your microphone first? Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF GWENDOLYN EADDY-SAMUEL, PRESIDENT,
CONNECTICUT PARENTS UNION**

Ms. EADDY-SAMUEL. Okay. We are good with directives.

Good morning, Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Minority—Ranking Minority Member Kildee, committee members, and distinguished fellow panelists—and for any moms up there, happy belated Mom’s Day. My name is Gwendolyn Samuel, and first and foremost I am a parent. I want us to be very clear: I am the consumer. My child is the consumer of the educational systems that we are discussing today.

I am a proud Head Start alumni, so Head Start works and I am clearly a product of it, and the founder of the Connecticut Parents Union, a membership association established to connect parents, guardians, and families with the resources and supports necessary to effectively advocate for the educational rights of children through shared decision-making, parent choice, equitable resources, fiscal responsible spending, and access to effective school boards, principals, and teachers.

And I want us to be very clear: I founded the Parents Union based on my experience when I introduced the parent trigger in Connecticut. I have never seen so much resistance against parents, and grandparents, and surrogate parents, and guardians of children who only want the best for their children.

So I want to be clear, when I just say choice I don’t think charters; I think of choosing—having the power to choose what is in the best interest of my children. And that could be traditional, it could be charter, it could be magnet, preschool, school readiness. I just want what is best for my kids, just like other parents across the country.

I really want to thank you for having this real talk, because this will be real talk. And for this conversation to be successful we need to have it in real time. What is the state of education in America? What is the state of education in my great state of Connecticut?

Because at the bottom line parent and family engagement is critical. And when I looked up engagement it means to enter into a pact or an agreement. So as a parent I just want to enter in an agreement with teachers, and educators, and administrators, and lawmakers, to ensure that at the end of the day you are putting the needs of children first. Because parents and families and communities are a child’s first teacher, so whether you like the color of my skin or the size of my waistline or my socioeconomics, at the end of the day and the beginning of the day and the middle of the day I am still responsible for my child’s overall well-being.

Children do not vote, they don’t sign medical release forms, nor do the children—nor me, as the parent—sign the school contract that will govern their educational experience. Children have the most to lose—and I want to emphasize that—children have the most to lose when parents are forced to keep children in low-performing schools, because when children lose access to a great edu-

cation they lose access to the opportunity to be productive citizens, they lose access to experience maybe a good career or technical college experience because they don't have the skill sets to not only enter college but to manage to graduate from college.

And, of course, it has an economic impact on us because we can't stabilize the economy because you don't have a workforce to draw from. And I tell my kids all day, "You have to get a good education because when I become a senior you need to be able to handle the affairs and I don't need someone that doesn't know how to do math, right?" So I make it very clear: There is a self-interest for parents of why we are here.

In 2010 I introduced the Parent Trigger Law. In January 2006—2010 I got an e-mail, and the e-mail said, "Parents Gain Power in California." This is like 1 o'clock in the morning. I am in, right? I said, "Whatever this is I want it," because I live in Connecticut, which has the worst achievement gap in the country. For black males, eight out of 10 of them have a better chance of going to prison than college. Connecticut pays over \$41,000 per inmate and on average \$15,000 per pupil for students.

So when I heard about this law I am saying, "Well, we have got the worst achievement gap. This sounds like something good, so let's bring it to lawmakers and to communities." When I introduced it to lawmakers some lawmakers said, "Gwen, you are going to make me lose my career." Some were saying, "This is going to cause the state to go crazy," and it did.

And I couldn't understand what was the problem with me having access to the tables to ensure better outcomes for my children. And so to do that we have to work together. And as I always say, as long as you have my child we are partners and joined at the hip.

So I introduced the parent trigger. Fast forward, we have—we created a more collaborative approach where it has teachers, students, principals, a non-voting principal. But the only challenges with it, you couldn't do anything with it until 3 years, and no child should have to languish in low-performing schools for 3 years for us to do something about it.

So that is the only downside to having the parent trigger, and when I heard that we were discussing it, Chairman Hunter and Congressman Kildee, I am just grateful. Parents from across the country are tuning in today because they want to hear what are we going to say to ensure that their children have access to great education.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Eaddy-Samuel follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Gwendolyn Eaddy-Samuel, Parent,
Founder of the Connecticut Parents Union**

Good Morning Chairman Hunter, Ranking Minority Member Kildee, committee members, and distinguished fellow panelists. I am honored to participate in this conversation about the vital role that parent and family engagement should play in improving our education system to ensure that all children have equitable access to high quality educational options, and to help our country become more economically stable and just.

My name is Gwendolyn Eaddy-Samuel. First and foremost, I am a parent of two children in Connecticut public schools. I am a proud Head Start Alumna. I am the Founder of the CT Parents Union (CTPU), a membership association established to connect parents, guardians and families with the resources and support necessary

to effectively advocate for the educational rights of children through shared decision making, parent choice, equitable resources, fiscally responsible spending, and access to effective school boards, principals and teachers.

In 2010, I was part of a coalition that introduced a version of the so called “Parent Trigger” law to Connecticut. Our version of the Parent Trigger law allows parents to make recommendations about governance changes to reform consistently low-performing schools. The downside to our version of the parent trigger law is that the details were developed in closed-door sessions that deliberately excluded parent groups. As a result, governance reforms can be too-easily delayed and watered down, leaving students trapped in failing schools.

In my testimony today, I want to make three points. First, I want to be clear about the problem. Second, I want to dispel some myths about parents and their engagement. And third, I want to be clear about the solution.

First, let’s talk about the real problem.

Using my great state as an example: an analysis of the State of Connecticut using almost any indicator of socio-economic progress quickly reveals stark contradictions in the opportunities available to its residents. Connecticut, one of the richest states in the nation, is also home to some of the nation’s poorest cities. Our state is home to some of the most prestigious schools in the nation, yet even our low-performing schools underperform low-performing schools elsewhere in the country. As a result, our state has the widest academic achievement gap in the nation, observable between rich and poor students, and between students of different races. The socio-economically disadvantaged in Connecticut’s urban cities tend to be people of color, trapped in schools that persistently fail to meet their need for a quality education.

As an example, a male who fails to graduate from high school is 47 times more likely to spend time in prison than a peer who finishes college. More than 40% of Black children do not graduate from high school. And prison, at least in Connecticut, costs us more than \$50,000 per inmate—more than three times what we spend on students in schools. At a time when other countries are elevating their performance, and when the economy is requiring greater skills, we are not investing wisely if we fail to meet the needs of our children.

Second, let’s dispel some myths about parents.

One myth is that these problems are all the parents’ fault. When my state’s Governor, Dan Malloy, took a tour throughout Connecticut to promote education reform, some local labor leaders greeted him with white papers and other arguments that parents “are in denial and blame the school or the teacher for their child’s behavior.”

Let’s take care of this myth that it’s the “parents fault” once and for all. What actually happens when parents try to get involved in their children’s schools? What actually happens is that the bureaucracy shuts them down.

- Take the example of Kelley Williams-Bolar, an Ohio mom who I arranged to come to Connecticut to address a group of parents. Ms. Williams-Bolar tried to get her children into a safer school than the one that existed in her neighborhood. She could not afford to move to a better school district, so she simply lied and said that she lived in a better district, so that her children could go to that safer school. How did we respond to this parent who wanted to send her kids to a better school? She was sent to jail.

- Or what about when parent groups tried to organize to get more involved in the legislative process in Connecticut back in 2010? I mentioned a moment ago that the Parent Trigger policy was weaker than it should have been because parents groups were excluded. In fact, if you look at a PowerPoint that was presented at a National Conference by the American Federation of Teachers in Connecticut, you’ll see that excluding parent groups was a deliberate strategy. In all fairness to AFT, some Connecticut parents were able to meet with union leadership; they apologized and removed the document from their website.

- Or, coming back to Connecticut, look at the Hartford area, the second poorest city in the country and the city with some of the lowest performing schools in the state. Nearly 16,000 students entered the Greater Hartford Regional School Choice lottery this year to get into good magnet or charter schools—but more than 10,000 of them were rejected. These are thousands and thousands of parents, just in Hartford, who are taking the time to do right by their kids.

As parents, we are legally required to send our kids to schools and we are legally required to pay for those schools with our taxes. So we are compelled to provide the money and the children but often have very little say in the outcomes. These types of experiences affect the parents’ will to become more engaged within school environments. Many parents feel no matter how hard they try to help improve educational outcomes for their children, they will face resistance.

Another myth is that parents and teachers are adversaries. This is a myth. Teachers have many different points of view, and too often you only hear one point of view. Many teachers celebrate actively engaged parents. You will hear a lot of educators who welcome parent engagement and parent choice. And to be clear, as a parent, I always celebrate great teachers who will help my children learn.

Finally, let's talk about the solution.

Part of the solution is adapting responsive public policy. In my home state of Connecticut, we saw the beginnings of "best practice" solutions. We had a Governor propose education reforms. These reforms were just a start—I'll get to that in a minute—but they were a good start.

Those opposed to meaningful education reform did the exact same thing that they did in 2010 to attack Parent empowerment reform—they had closed-door meetings with legislators to try to water down the bill. And when this bill came out of committee, it was loaded down with loopholes and exceptions that would have made reform limited. In my opinion, this was about to be another story of how we failed to make things better for the neediest children.

But a funny thing happened. Parents became more active. Parents started contacting their legislators and calling them and writing them and talking about what they needed. Leaders from the African American faith community spoke up, demanding reform. The Governor Malloy provided air cover for parents, making it clear he would veto this bill if it kept all these loopholes. And, crucially, the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus in the Connecticut State Legislature came together. This is a part-time legislature, but they worked long hours to read this entire bill. They debated, and they listened to parents, and they went to their leadership to demand that most of those loopholes get stripped away. And pro-reform teachers spoke up, too. This clearly demonstrated that the public will exist to do right by children.

So, what do we need to do in Connecticut and elsewhere?

What we need is choice. Here is a list of things that all states must do to create more high-quality school options and relevant information for all students:

- State law must ensure that parents receive meaningful information about their schools and teachers, including a letter grade or some indicator easily identified by parents.

- Any school that accepts taxpayer funding for students—traditional, magnet, charter, or private—must submit to state financial review and student achievement review.

- States or districts should implement a disclosure rule granting parents knowledge of a teacher's track record regarding student achievement and allow parents to access an alternative, effective classroom.

- While Parent Trigger laws may vary from state to state, laws need to be put in places that allow parents to "trigger" a school turnaround when a school systemically fails to meet the needs of children. State law must be constructed to ensure that eligible federal dollars can be used to help fund the turnaround. Crucially, parents must be allowed to exercise this option without harassment or undue delay.

- Subject to these guidelines, state law and district policy should make high-quality choices available to students through the following tools:

All students should be funded equally, regardless of the type of school they attend, so long as the schools prove results in a timely manner.

Low-income students, children in foster care, homeless children and the neediest children should have access to public scholarships to attend high-quality public and private schools, so long as those private schools are willing to accept public oversight for safety, academic performance, and financial integrity.

In collaboration with the State, charter schools with proven academic results should be encouraged to expand. Such schools should not face any numerical caps, financial disadvantage, or arbitrary and burdensome red tape. Instead, they should receive appropriate fast-track approvals, access to taxpayer-funded facilities (based on community need), and the ability to leverage public-private partnerships and funding.

Charter authorizers should be willing to approve new charter schools on a provisional basis, allowing them to demonstrate results, but moving quickly if they do not improve performance.

Districts should be required to pass on all of the approved per-pupil funding to school providers chosen by parents, with the exception of authorizer fees to manage accountability.

Low-performing schools must not be tolerated. The state must provide a clear mechanism to turn around low-performing schools—regardless of whether those schools are traditional public schools, charter schools, or private schools receiving public scholarship students. Any school with a sustained record of failure should not continue to receive public funding.

These reforms, together, will create the conditions that will allow parents to effectively engage with teachers and school leaders to create better outcomes for all children.

Most school districts across Connecticut and abroad are facing the impacts of this education and economic crisis. We will only improve outcomes if we build effective partnerships among parents and schools; spend our resources effectively; and provide meaningful high-quality choices for families. This is a much more realistic and just choice than burdening our society with failed schools, overcrowded prison and juvenile systems, and an overreliance on safety nets and social services.

In closing, it is immoral for children to be consigned to systemically low performing public schools.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, ma'am.
Now Dr. Fletcher is recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. MARIA A. FLETCHER, PRESIDENT,
NEW YORK STATE PTA**

Ms. FLETCHER. Good morning. Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, subcommittee members, and fellow distinguished panelists, I am honored to speak before you today on behalf of the more than 5 million members of the National Parent Teacher Association. I am Maria Fletcher, president of the New York State PTA, comprising nearly 350,000 members working to improve educational outcomes for children in New York State.

PTA has been working to improve the education of our nation's children for more than 115 years. At the state and local levels PTA promotes systemic school-parent collaboration to increase student achievement in all schools, even those that don't have a PTA.

I first became involved in education more than 30 years ago as a parent of a new kindergartener. As my children progressed through school my husband and I became increasingly frustrated with the limited parent-teacher interaction and lack of student and school data made available to parents. I remember walking out of parent-teacher conferences having been told, "Brian is doing well," with no information on what "well" meant or how we, as parents, could play a role in continuing his academic success.

I thought about parents of children who may not be performing as well as my son. What about parents of students with learning disabilities, or parents of students attending lower-performing schools in less affluent districts? This prompted me to not only advocate for my child but also all children, first through involvement in PTA and later as a member of my local school board.

Access to performance information wasn't the norm, and while we have advanced in the use of data to empower parents we must remember that there is only value if the available data is high-quality, understandable, and actionable for parents and families. When parents are not equipped with meaningful information, transparency, regardless of good intent, achieves limited results.

Parents and families must be equipped with the tools to engage in individual student learning and whole-school reform. Parents must be equipped with an understanding of educational delivery structures as they exist to serve their children. All parents must know how to advocate for their children, whether that be by exercising school choice options or collaborating to strengthen the school that their child currently attends.

Until 2010 I served as a local school board member in Valley Stream, New York. Fellow board members and I worked to ensure that every school in our district included parent representation in decision-making processes.

Most importantly, the school-level practice served to build relational trust since parent representation was identified and selected by parent peers, not by school or district personnel. This systemic collaboration allowed the board to enter into decision-making with confidence that the parent voice had been integral to any recommendations considered.

All children, regardless of their parents' educational attainment, socioeconomic status, or zip code, deserve a quality education. First and foremost, parents want to know that their neighborhood school is preparing students through quality instruction and a safe climate that is conducive to learning. Unfortunately, that is not the case in all of our public schools, and while PTA supports innovative, quality public school choice options, the reality is that choice for the sake of choice does not guarantee systemic or sustainable improvements.

Research shows that when parents are effectively engaged student achievement increases and school climate improves. This is especially true with chronically low-performing schools. Yet all too often we discuss parent engagement through a narrow lens limited only to school choice.

Public school choice is a good thing but choice shouldn't be viewed as the only engagement strategy. Perhaps we are asking the wrong question. Instead of seeking to empower parents by providing alternatives to their neighborhood school why aren't we empowering parents by engaging all stakeholders to ensure that every neighborhood school lives up to the quality promise we have made to educate all children?

We should empower parents by preparing our teachers and leaders in research-based family engagement practices that have demonstrated positive effect on student achievement and school climate. We should empower parents with real, tangible tools to supplement school learning at home coupled with assessable, understandable, and actionable data that informs school instruction and learning.

"Your school is broken; send your child here instead," isn't tantamount to effectively engaging parents in education. This is especially true in areas where meaningful school choice isn't an option.

New York State PTA, with New York PIRCs, is collaborating with our state educational agency to support family engagement as a catalyst for closing the achievement gap in Title 1 schools. We are working to advance the New York State Board of Regents approved family engagement policies through focus on district-level family engagement quality indicators, teacher and leader professional development, and inclusion of culturally competent family engagement curriculum in higher education and professional certification programs.

I understand the purpose of this hearing is to discuss local and state efforts. However, we believe federal leadership is important. We are especially thankful to Congresswoman McCarthy and Con-

gressman Platts for their leadership on this issue via introduction of H.R. 1821, the Family Engagement in Education Act.

While thankful for these efforts, including the provisions in their reauthorization, we urge the committee to consider further the role of research-based family engagement policies and programs. Without parents at the table both at school and at home reform that equips all public schools to provide world-class education will not become a reality.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.
[The statement of Dr. Fletcher follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Maria A. Fletcher, Ph.D., President,
New York State PTA**

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, subcommittee members, and fellow distinguished panelists; I am honored to have the opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of the more than five million members of the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and to discuss the importance of meaningful family engagement in student learning and school success. With more than 24,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific. I speak to you today as the President of the New York State PTA, comprising nearly 350,000 members working to improve educational outcomes for children and families in New York State.

Founded in 1897, PTA has been working to improve the education, health, and overall well-being of our nation's children for more than 115 years. As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, PTA's legacy of influencing local, state, and federal policy has made an indelible impact in the lives of millions of children and families. This legacy includes the creation of kindergarten classes, a juvenile justice system, child labor laws, mandatory immunizations for school children, and continues today as PTA fights to ensure recognition of family engagement programs and practices as a vital component of sustainable education reforms and increased student achievement. The influence of PTA is most readily felt at the state and local levels, where the association works tirelessly to promote systemic, comprehensive, and meaningful school and district-parent collaboration to better serve all students; even in schools where no PTA has been formed. It is the local and state level work and experiences I am here to speak about today.

I first became involved in education more than 30 years ago as an eager parent of a new kindergarten student in Valley Stream, New York. As my children progressed through school, my husband and I became increasingly frustrated with the limited parent-teacher interaction and poor quality of the information shared regarding our children's academic progression and the overall quality of our children's school. I remember walking out of the annual parent-teacher conference having been told "Brian is doing well * * *" with no additional information on what "well" meant or how we, as parents, could play a role in ensuring continued success. Were there areas for improvement? What was he learning? What were the expectations? What could we, as parents, be doing at home to build on classroom instruction during his out-of-school time?

I started thinking about the parents of children who may not be performing as well as my son Brian. What about the parents of students attending lower-performing schools in districts not as good as Valley Stream? This frustration prompted me to not only advocate for my child, but also for all children through involvement in PTA and later as a member of my local school board. Parents and families must be empowered with the tools to engage in not only individual student learning, but also school reform and improvement. Parents must be equipped with an understanding of educational delivery structures that exist to serve their children and community so they, too, can advocate for their children, whether that be by exercising school choice options or collaborating to strengthen the school their child attends. There was a time when access to performance information wasn't the norm; and while we've come a long way in our use of data to empower parent involvement in education, we must remember that there's only value if the available data is high quality, understandable and actionable for parents and families. As PTA has stated previously, when parents are not equipped with meaningful information, transparency, regardless of good intent, achieves limited results.

For eleven years, I served as a Trustee of both the District 30 and Valley Stream Central High School Boards of Education. Fellow board members and I worked to

ensure that all schools across our district included parent representation in decision-making processes dealing with everything from curriculum to student health and safety. Perhaps most importantly, this school-level practice served to build relational trust among parents and school leaders, with parent representation identified and selected by parent peers, not simply appointed by school personnel. While I no longer serve as school board member, the current superintendent has continued to encourage this practice, as well as instituted regular district-level conversations with PTA leadership from all schools. I can say that increased collaboration at the school and district level made my job as a school board trustee easier—allowing me to enter into district-level decision-making with confidence that the parent voice was integral to moving recommendations forward.

We all agree that children, regardless of their parents' educational attainment, socioeconomic status, or zip code, deserve a quality education. But what I have truly come to realize through my involvement in the PTA is that all parents—despite all the barriers I have previously mentioned—also want to be the driving force in ensuring their children have a quality, world-class education. First and foremost, parents want to know that their neighborhood school is preparing students for college and career through quality instruction and a safe climate conducive to learning. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all public schools, and while PTA supports the introduction of innovative quality public school choice options that serve to increase student achievement, the reality is that choice for the sake of choice does not guarantee systemic or sustainable improvements to our nation's educational delivery system.

More than forty years of research shows that when families and communities are effectively engaged in student learning and school improvement, student achievement increases. This is especially true of chronically low-performing schools. According to a longitudinal study of school turnaround efforts in Chicago public schools, family engagement is one of five necessary ingredients to sustainable reform and increased student achievement: as necessary as school leadership and curriculum alignment. The evidence is clear, yet all too often we discuss parent engagement through a narrowed lens limited only to school choice.

Public school choice is a good thing—but choice shouldn't be viewed as an engagement strategy. Perhaps we're asking the wrong question—instead of asking how to empower parents by providing alternatives to their neighborhood school, why aren't we empowering parents by engaging all stakeholders to ensure that every neighborhood school lives up to the quality promise we've made to educate all students? All public schools—traditional, charter, magnet—must have the capacity to build and capitalize on effective school-family partnerships to increase student achievement.

We should empower parents by preparing our teachers and leaders in research-based and culturally competent family engagement practices that have demonstrated positive impact on student achievement and school climate. We should empower parents with real, tangible tools to supplement student learning at home coupled with accessible, understandable, and actionable student and school data that serves to inform and support instruction and learning. "Your school is broken—send your child here instead" isn't tantamount to effectively engaging parents in education. This is especially true in areas where meaningful school choice isn't a real feasibility—areas like remote rural New York State.

I am proud to report that efforts to implement sustainable reforms by partnering with parents to make all schools great are currently underway in my home state of New York. Concerned with the sustainability of education reform implementation due to lack of stakeholder collaboration and understanding, Every Person Influences Children (EPIC) and Cornell Cooperative Extension, both former Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) grantees came together with NYS PTA. As a team collaborated with NYSED to develop the On the Same Page Summit: A NYS Summit for Family Engagement in Education to support systemic change in the New York State Educational System through strategic dialogue and action on family engagement as a catalyst for closing the achievement gap in Title I schools.

As an outgrowth of the annual summit and in recognition of the role family engagement plays in student and school success, NYS is working to advance New York State's Board of Regents approved statewide family engagement policies. Specific areas of focus include:

- Approval of family engagement quality indicators and assessment tool for Local Educational Agencies;
- Teacher and school leader professional development in family engagement practices;
- Implementation and replication of research-based strategies to engage diverse families; and

- Inclusion of culturally-competent family engagement in higher education and professional certification programs.

In New York State, while many parents are provided with public school choice options in addition to the neighborhood public school, we recognize the importance of building the capacity of all schools and families to meaningfully partner for the benefit of our students. Thankfully, NYSED recognizes the importance of providing local educational agencies with access to statewide support and technical assistance for local implementation of research-based, proven effective policies and programs to improve communication between schools and families. PTA is committed to improving parent understanding of school accountability and data, informing families of public school choice options, and empowering parents to support learning at home and in the community; all of which is necessary to maintain momentum and ensure sustainability of education reforms.

I understand the purpose of this hearing is to discuss local and state efforts; however, PTA believes federal leadership is important to ensuring all districts and states are able to meaningfully partner with parents. We are especially thankful to Congresswoman McCarthy and Congressman Platts of this Committee for their leadership via introduction of H.R.1821, The Family Engagement in Education Act, legislation that encompasses recommendations to ensure sustainability of practice while allowing for and rewarding local flexibility. While thankful for the bipartisan attention that family engagement has garnered during the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization process, we strongly urge the Committee to further consider the role of research-based family engagement policies and programming that are both more effective and far-reaching than school choice as communicated through the provisions of H.R. 1821.

I conclude with this thought—without parents at the table, both at school and at home, sustainable reforms that equip all public schools to provide a world-class education will not become a reality. PTA continues to advocate for prioritization of family engagement in education—and this is why I will continue to engage in this important work. Our nation’s children and families deserve the benefits of quality family-school partnerships.

I would like to again thank Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, subcommittee members, and my fellow panelists for the opportunity to engage in a discussion on the question of how to meaningfully empower and partner with parents. Thank you and I would be happy to respond to any questions that you may have.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Dr. Fletcher.
I would like to recognize Mr. Ziebarth for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF TODD ZIEBARTH, VICE PRESIDENT, STATE ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT, NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

Mr. ZIEBARTH. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Hunter and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today as you discuss how states are expanding parent and student educational options.

My name is Todd Ziebarth. I am the vice president for state advocacy and support at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The National Alliance is a nonprofit organization working to grow the number of high-quality public charter schools available to all families, particularly those who currently don’t have access to high-quality public schools.

There are currently 41 states and the District of Columbia that have charter laws on the books and there are over 5,600 charters open serving more than 2 million kids. Annual growth in the public charter school movement is strong, with 400 to 500 new charters opening each year and 150,000 to 200,000 new students enrolling in charters each year.

At the same time that we are seeing such robust growth in the movement we know there is still a significant demand from parents

and students that is not being met, as over 400,000 students sit on charter school waiting lists across the country.

One of the major reasons that we are seeing such healthy growth in the charter school movement is that many states are significantly strengthening their charter school laws in three areas. First, states are lifting their caps on growth, either partially or entirely. Over the past 2 years alone 12 states have done so. Most notably, North Carolina removed its cap of 100 charter schools and Michigan phased out its cap on the number of charters that can be approved by public universities there.

Second, states are taking steps to provide more equitable charter school funding and facilities support, which is especially critical given that charter students only receive 75 percent of the funding that their traditional school counterparts get. Over the past 2 years alone 12 states have taken steps to remedy these student inequities.

Of particular note, Indiana enacted legislation that created a charter school facility assistance program to make grants and loans available to charters. It appropriated \$17 million to this program and it required school districts to make vacant space available to charters to lease for \$1 a year or to buy for \$1.

Third, states are strengthening their authorizing environments to improve charter accountability. Over the past 2 years 13 states have done so. Most significantly, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Rhode Island have passed major quality control measures setting the stage for the future growth of high-quality charters in these three states.

In addition to the progress in these three areas we are also seeing increasingly strong efforts to enact charter laws in the states that don't have them. In fact, Maine enacted a charter law in 2011, becoming the 42nd jurisdiction that allows this innovative public school option. In the remaining nine states that have not yet enacted charter laws there is growing momentum to do so in Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, and Washington.

As states have expanded charters through the actions I have discussed, public charter schools have, in turn, expanded the ways in which public education engages parents. First and foremost, charters have empowered parents to choose new public school options. Now, some parents, usually those of means, already have plenty of options.

What is unique about charters, though, is that they have provided thousands of public school options to parents with more limited means, as 52 percent of charter student qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, as compared to 45 percent in traditional public schools. Many of these parents have had very limited options, if any, until charters.

Charters have also created new kinds of partnerships with parents. At KIPP charter schools, for example, parents, as well as students and teachers, sign a learning pledge, called the "Commitment to Excellence," which ensures that all parties will do whatever it takes to help students learn. The Commitment and other similar agreements can serve as effective tools for schools to use as they establish expectations about the school and manage parent engagement in the school.

In addition to such agreements, charters partner with parents in other unique ways, most notably by involving them in the decision-making and governance of the school. In some cases, parents serve as members of the charter school's governing board, playing a role in school-level governance not available to parents in a traditional district environment.

Charters also engage parents by providing them services. For example, some charters offer GED, English language, college credit, and parenting classes to parents after hours.

And lastly, some charters engage parents by conducting parent surveys to identify what activities parents would be willing to help out with and what skills they have that might benefit the school. Schools then use this information when they are looking to engage parents in specific activities at the school.

In conclusion, we are encouraged that many states are significantly strengthening their charter laws to support high-quality public charter school growth. These schools will not only provide more options to parents and students but they will also serve as laboratories of innovation to positively influence the larger traditional public school system in many areas, including parent engagement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present today, and I am happy to answer any questions you have at the appropriate time. [The statement of Mr. Ziebarth follows:]

Prepared Statement of Todd Ziebarth, Vice President, State Advocacy and Support, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Good morning Chairman Hunter and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Subcommittee today as it discusses how states are expanding parent and student educational options.

My name is Todd Ziebarth. I am the Vice President of State Advocacy and Support at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The National Alliance is a nonprofit organization working to grow the number of high-quality public charter schools available to all families, especially those who currently don't have access to good public schools. The National Alliance develops and advocates for improved public policies, provides assistance to state charter school associations and resource centers, and serves as the united voice for this large and diverse movement.

Currently, 41 states and the District of Columbia have charter laws on the books. There are more than 5,600 charters open, serving over two million students. Annual growth in the public charter school movement is strong, with 400 to 500 new charters opening each year and 150,000 to 200,000 new students enrolling in charters each year. At the same time we're seeing such robust growth, we know there is still a significant demand not being met, as over 400,000 students remain on charter waiting lists across the country.

One of the major reasons that we're seeing such healthy growth in the public charter school movement is that many states are significantly strengthening their charter laws in three major areas.

First, states are lifting their caps on charter growth—either partially or entirely. Over the past two years, 12 states have done so. Most notably, North Carolina eliminated its cap of 100 charter schools, Michigan phased out its cap on the number of charter schools that can be approved by public universities, and Indiana and Wisconsin removed their limits on virtual charter enrollment.

Second, states are taking steps to provide more equitable charter school funding and facilities support, which is especially critical given that charter students only receive 75% of the funding that their traditional public school counterparts get. Over the past two years, 12 states have done so. Of particular note, Indiana enacted legislation that creates a charter school facilities assistance program to make grants and loans to charter schools, appropriates \$17 million to this program, and requires school districts to make vacant space available to public charter schools to lease for \$1 a year or to buy for \$1. Also, Texas enacted a law that allows state-authorized

charter schools that have an investment grade rating and meet certain financial criteria to apply to have their bonds guaranteed by the Permanent School Fund.

Third, states are strengthening their authorizing environments to improve charter accountability. Over the past two years, 13 states have done so. Most significantly, four states created new statewide charter boards, while Hawaii, New Mexico, and Rhode Island passed major quality control measures setting the stage for the future growth of high-quality public charter schools in these states.¹

In addition to the progress in the three areas of caps, funding and facilities support, and authorizing, we are seeing increasingly strong efforts to finally enact charter laws in the states that still don't have them. In fact, Maine enacted a charter law in 2011, becoming the 42nd jurisdiction that allows this innovative public school option. In the remaining nine states that have not yet enacted charter laws, there is growing momentum to finally do so in Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, and Washington.

As states have expanded public charter schools through the actions I've discussed, public charter schools have, in turn, expanded the ways in which public education engages parents in several ways.²

First and foremost, charters have empowered parents to choose new public school options. Now some parents, usually those of means, already have plenty of options. What's unique about charters is that they've provided thousands of public school options to parents without means, as 52% of charter students qualify for free and reduced price lunch (vs. 45% in traditional public schools). Many of these parents have had very limited options—if any—until now.

Charters have also created new kinds of partnership with parents. At KIPP charter schools, for example, parents (as well as students and teachers) sign a learning pledge called the "Commitment to Excellence," which ensures that all parties will do whatever it takes to help the student learn. Example items from the Commitment include:

- We will make sure our child arrives at KIPP every day by 7:25 a.m. (Monday-Friday) or boards a KIPP bus at the scheduled time.
- We will always help our child in the best way we know how and we will do whatever it takes for him/her to learn. This also means that we will check our child's homework every night, let him/her call the teacher if there is a problem with the homework, and try to read with him/her every night.³

The Commitment and other similar agreements can serve as effective tools for schools to use as they establish expectations about the school and manage parent engagement in the school.

In addition to such agreements, charters partner with parents in other unique ways, most notably by involving them in the decision-making and governance of the school. In some cases, parents serve as members of the charter school's governing board, playing a role in school-level governance not available to parents in a traditional district environment, in which one central school board makes policy decisions for all of the schools in the district. This type of school-level governance is mandated by law in six states, and utilized by choice in individual charter schools in many other states.

Charters also engage parents by providing them services. For example, one charter school runs an employment office for parents, focusing on job opportunities for refugee parents with limited English skills. In addition to direct service provision, some schools offer GED, English-language, college-credit, and parenting classes for parents after hours.

Another way that charters engage parents is by conducting parent surveys to identify what activities parents would be willing to help out with and what skills they had that might benefit the school. Schools then use this information when they are looking to engage parents in specific activities.

In conclusion, we are encouraged that many states are significantly strengthening their charter laws to support high-quality public charter school growth. These schools will not only provide more options to parents and students, but they will

¹By "quality control measures," we mean the following provisions: transparent charter application, review, and decision-making processes; performance-based charter contracts; comprehensive charter school monitoring and data collection processes; and, clear processes for renewal, nonrenewal, and revocation decisions.

²A primary resource for this testimony's comments on parent engagement is Parent Involvement in Urban Charter Schools: A New Paradigm or the Status Quo? by Joanna Smith and Priscilla Wohlstetter, October 2009—http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/conference/papers/Smith%20-Wohlstetter_COMPLETE.pdf

³To see a sample Commitment to Excellent from KIPP, see http://www.kipp.org/files/dmfile/KIPP_Commitment_to_Excellence_Sample.pdf

also serve as laboratories of innovation to positively influence the larger traditional public school system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you, Mr. Ziebarth.

And thank you all for your testimony.

I am going to start out, first question for Ms. Eaddy-Samuel and Mr. Chavous. You talk about choices and you talk about not necessarily pinning those choices on a charter school but looking at anything that makes sense. Can you just talk about that for a minute, and the different types of—call them structures that states can use to provide the education to the kids?

Mr. CHAVOUS. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. To me the essence of parental school choice is not a zero sum game. It is not an either-or proposition. A lot of people who talk about education reform try to put, you know, the issue of reform in different boxes.

To me, you know, we have got to fly the plane while we fix it. For the long term let's look at systemic reform. Let's look at putting things in place that will fix wholesale school districts.

But in the meantime we are losing too many kids, so having all options on the table is critically important. Plus, we know, similar to when you go through a buffet line at a restaurant, not everyone is going to want chicken fried steak. So if that is the only option you have and you are penalized or victimized by your zip code to be in a school where, like, as Ms. Samuel knows, there is a school in Hartford where 95 percent of the kids are failing. Well, because of the zip code those kids have—and those parents have no other options. That is not right.

There is nothing wrong with having a wholesale menu of options—public school choice, charter schools, private schools, tax credits, magnet schools, specialty schools—whatever will help a child learn. And in my experience, where you have more options you have more engagement because once the school district knows that parents are educated consumers and they can shop for options and they can find the program that meets the needs of their individual children then a certain magic happens.

We have seen it here in the District; we have seen it in New Orleans; we have seen it in Milwaukee; we have seen it in Florida. We have seen it in places where there is more choice, there are more opportunities, and it actually provides an incentive for the school district to take the issue of individual children's engagement more seriously.

Ms. EADDY-SAMUEL. So I am going to talk about this from a legal standpoint because I am obligated by law to send my child to school. So it is past just me having the good heart. So if I don't send my child to school it is educational neglect; if I send my child to an unsafe school or a school that can't meet his need it is still educational neglect because the needs of my children won't get met. And we pay taxes and schools are supposed to be designed to meet the needs of children.

Now, in regards to the parent trigger, when I saw it in California I saw it as a last resort. The parent trigger is just a mechanism that allows parents to improve the system when all else fails.

In Connecticut we are one of six states that will arrest parents for going out of school district to get a better school. Or you could be a homeless mother that had been displaced. Or you could be a divorced parent that has met some obstacles. But as soon as you try to access a school that might not be performing great in your district into another one we could be arrested.

We can't have it both ways. You either want me a part of the process to ensure my child's well-being or then he becomes—he or she becomes the tax burden where the social nets and all the other supports that are needed, or the prison system, the school-to-prison pipeline.

And I, for one, as a parent can't allow that to be. I could just not give my child into a system and say with the luck of the draw we hope for the best.

So having these conversations you—parents across the country—Parenting Magazine, Mom Congress, Parents out of Pennsylvania—thousands of members—traditional and nontraditional parent groups are weighing in because they want to say, “How can I ensure that my child's need is being met?” And that only can happen by giving parents the legal power to improve the system.

And right now we are only good to sit at public forums like this or weigh in with the school board, but at the end of the day someone else is making the decision even if it is not in the best interest of children.

So having the parent trigger, having choice helps to stabilize communities, because one thing I can say for sure with the parent trigger, even though Connecticut probably has the weakest version, one thing I am 100 percent sure, some parents who had never visited the school now are engaged. We have parents who are in the child welfare systems who have to take parenting supports. Now they are asking the conversations because they know they at least have something that they can leverage when all else fails—foster parents, adoptive families.

The parent trigger and having choice helps level the playing field for the most neediest children. And even when they talked about vouchers and scholarships, or what do you call them, scholarships, I was a little concerned. But to help level the playing field you would give children that, for the most part, won't have access to high-quality schools that access.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank you both. Sounds like it is about school choice and it is about parental involvement.

I would like to recognize the ranking member, Mr. Dale Kildee, for—

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Fletcher, to what degree does the participation of a parent or parents make a difference, perhaps more than the type of school, whether it be a public, charter school, or a private school? In a traditional public school how would effective parental outreach significantly improve the quality of education in that school?

I guess my question is, what is more significant, the parental involvement or the type of school?

Ms. FLETCHER. When parents are involved in the school we know through research—and a lot of it has been done by the Harvard Research Project—that school performance of their children in-

creases,; achievement of outcomes increases. Parents need to be engaged but they also need to be invited into the system to be engaged, and for many of the schools throughout the country, that very welcoming environment doesn't exist.

The family partnership standards that PTA endorses and many states have also taken on as standards for their schools—Rochester in New York State has accepted the standards—provides for opportunities for parents to feel welcome in the school. From the moment that they cross that door they are invited to speak to teachers; you don't have to have an appointment at a time that is not convenient to you; principals, who are the leaders in school buildings, are very open and flexible in meeting with parents.

But real parent engagement means that parents have to sit at the table when decisions about what kinds of programmatic changes or curricula are offered, and that takes a commitment on the part of school districts; it takes a commitment on the part of the states in which those school districts find themselves to make that commitment that parents are an important voice.

That voice is so critical to student achievement, because once you become involved in the school you start asking questions, and those questions hopefully will generate change in the district. School choice is an important option for parents, but school choice is not something that every parent can be a part of because it often is limited in the amount of space in any of these choice programs, whether they are charter schools, whether it is vouchers. Parents that are motivated are always engaged. It is those parents who find a hard time feeling welcome in the school, find a hard time to really feel that their voice makes a difference.

So with PTA—and I can speak very specifically about New York State PTA—we are consistently offering opportunities for parents to learn how they can become part of the educational process in their schools to help their children by asking questions, by demanding answers to questions, but more importantly, by having the tools that they need—the data of their children—so that they can be informed of whether their child is progressing as their child is progressing, not after the fact.

In New York State assessment data comes after the child completes his or her educational year. Not effective because now that child is going into another school year possibly with deficits.

We need some kind of very formative types of assessments that occur during the school year so that any difficulties children have can be addressed not only within the school but with the parents, as well. That is what parent engagement is.

Mr. KILDEE. How can an organization like PTA—because you have a school board, you have the administrators in the building—how can the PTA enhance the involvement of parents in improving the quality of that school?

Ms. FLETCHER. A lot of that is information that can be shared with parents. What we try very much to instill in our leaders throughout New York State is that they need to inform parents of what rights they have in the educational process.

Many parents feel that they have little say in the educational process and that is absolutely not true. Parents are the best advocates for their children. As a state association we can advocate on

behalf of all children, but as a parent I have the right and I have the obligation to advocate on the behalf of my child, and then, by extension, all children.

The role of PTA in a school building would be to inform parents of what their rights are—not just if their—if their child has learning disabilities, but all children, regardless of what their educational level or achievement potential is. That means sharing best practices. That means having parents sit at the table. And I believe that that is critical that parents need to be part of the decision-making process, not just the recipient of what school administrations or school boards decide for children.

Mr. KILDEE. Thank you, Dr. Fletcher.

Ms. EADDY-SAMUEL. Am I allowed to weigh in or no? Oh, sorry.

Chairman HUNTER. Not right now, if you don't mind. But if someone else wants to—there will be a time.

I will recognize now the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Kline, for—

Mr. KLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the panelists for being here today.

It is kind of fun to sit here and realize that we are all in violent agreement that having parents involved is a good thing. And of course the challenge is, how do you get the parents involved and what is the role of the federal government in getting parents involved? And those are things that we are looking at and exploring.

And some of us up here are very, very big supporters and proponents of programs like the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program, the incredible touching stories that have come out of that. And I have had discussions with parents and grandparents who are just desperate—desperate to—for their children or grandchildren to have an opportunity to succeed and to be rescued—that is a terrible way to think about this, but be rescued from horribly failing schools in some places.

And so it seems to me that the more choice that parents have the more they are likely to be involved and the better outcomes we will have for our children and the better hope for their future that we will have. And yet there are strong opponents to choice programs, particularly any choice program that includes the word “voucher.”

And typically these organizations who are opponents of broader choice than just public school choice say, “Well, you are taking money. You are taking money away from the public schools and therefore we can't do that.” And yet, our per-pupil spending across the board is up even in areas where you have established choice programs.

So, Mr. Chavous, I am going to turn to you and ask, how can that statement be true that if you have a choice program you are taking money—we know it is not the case in D.C. with the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program because of the way it was put together, but can you address that challenge, if you will? And then if you have some examples where we have actually, through a choice program, been able to lower cost for local districts I would just like to hear you explore that aspect.

Mr. CHAVOUS. Sure. Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

For instance, in Louisiana, where the scholarship was just around \$4,000 and the per-pupil spending in New Orleans was double that, in most of these places where you have these opportunity scholarships the cost is lower because the scholarship is being made available to parents to go to—directly to tuition and you are not feeding a bureaucracy, you are not feeding a system.

One of the biggest challenges we have in school districts, and I know this very well having—you know, I had oversight over the D.C. public school system—is that we know that less than 60—65 percent of the dollars that a school district has will go into the classroom. So most of the money—a good portion of the money—and it varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but a good portion of the money does not go directly in the classroom.

The beauty of these scholarships is that you know that the money is going to go directly to the institution that is going to provide the education for these kids. And so there is savings in Florida; there is savings in Milwaukee; there is savings in New Orleans; and as you know, savings here in D.C.

And the real thing, I think, that we have to keep in mind in terms of some of the opposition, this is not—this should not be a political exercise. I mean, I think if we are going to—we should need to de-politicize this education issue in this country. That's what sets us apart, frankly, in a negative way from our peers in other industrialized nations. I have travelled around the world and what I have seen in Finland, in Belgium, in Taiwan, in other parts of the industrialized world, is that they don't put the same level of politics associated with creative and innovative proposals.

We do. So, you know, if you are a Democrat you are supposed to line up a certain way; if you are a Republican you are supposed to line up a certain way. And what is lost, I think, is really saying, look, what is best for children, particularly children with the greatest need who come from the highest poverty districts who we know if we don't step in and do something now they will fail? And I think that is the essence of parental choice that people need to keep in mind. Not only is it a way to engage children where they are and save them, but frankly, it helps our community, as Gwen alluded to.

Mr. KLINE. Thank you. I have got about 20 seconds left.

You wanted to weigh in? This is your chance.

Ms. EADDY-SAMUEL. So, I have two children in the public school system. They both attend traditional schools. But as I know my child, my middle school child needs to be in another environment; he is a hands-on learner. So I should be able to have that option because at the end of the day I want him to succeed, like we all should want him to succeed.

Buildings don't educate children; it is the people in them. And so it is not about you rescuing. I don't need rescuing; I need access to the power so that when it doesn't work—it is more cost effective when it works.

It is when it doesn't work what do you expect me to do? It is not about having my voice. We can have bake sales and plant sales all day long but at the end of the day it is about accessing those 26 letters to the alphabet.

So with all due respect, you know, to have someone else tell me what is best for my child, it is not going to work. But if we work together with the teacher and with the educators, the systems, it is saying, "Okay, this is what my child needs. What do you need from me as a parent? What do I need from you as a teacher? What are the expectations? And then how are we going to get it done?"

At the end of the day it is that—to ensure that the needs of children get met first. So I don't need rescuing—

Mr. KLINE. Thanks. I see my time has expired.

Chairman HUNTER. Like to recognize Mr. Scott for 5 minutes?

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for calling the hearing.

I would like to thank all the witnesses, especially Mr. Chavous, who I have known for a long time.

Fact is our public schools need more resources, not less, and the voucher initiatives tend to divert funds that could be used for public schools into private school vouchers. Instead of helping public schools they will—the vouchers help a privileged few who can get access to a voucher and have the resources to actually use it to pay for the cost of education. The cost of education often is more than just the tuition charge. Many schools are subsidized and so the recipient not only has to cover the tuition but also has to get access to a charity or religious institution that would subsidize the full cost of the education.

We have heard a lot about parent choice to a private school education. That choice is only available to those who win a voucher lottery. And then so it is not a choice; it is really, maybe, a chance.

With the same logic we could solve the Social Security problem by selling lotto tickets. Those who win the lotto will be much better off. But of course, few will win; those who do not win will not be helped at all.

Likewise, 90 percent of the people who seek a voucher will lose the voucher lottery so they don't have any choice at all. Even though they have entered the voucher lottery they didn't get a choice. They will remain in the public schools; those schools will be worse off because money has been diverted.

So we know that those who get vouchers will be worse off. Incredibly, evidence is now showing that even those who win the voucher lottery may not be better off at all. Studies in D.C. and in Milwaukee reveal that there is virtually no improvement in education. Furthermore, those students in the program that were—that we are supposed to be helping are not the ones benefiting.

Those in failing schools represent a small portion of those who use the vouchers because many of those who use the vouchers were already in private schools. In fact, only 75 out of 1,300 vouchers in D.C. went to students who were previously enrolled in failing schools.

The schools that these children attend with vouchers are not covered by the same educational accountability standards as public schools and the students and employees are not covered by the same civil rights protections. In fact, we have had problems with students with disabilities and how they are being treated.

So our challenge as legislators is to come up with a policy—promote a policy that improves the education for everyone, not just the

politically connected, privileged few who can activate the program and take care of their children. One of the things that I have heard is that those parents who are well-engaged, and sophisticated, and can figure out the system pick the better schools.

My question, Dr. Fletcher: If all of the sophisticated—if you have a failing school and all of the sophisticated parents, very much involved parents, elect to go somewhere else and the school—the failing school—is relegated with students of parents who are not sophisticated and not engaged, what does that do to the system?

Ms. FLETCHER. There are many parents who do not feel comfortable bringing their concerns or their issues into the educational system, into their school buildings. And I think that is a reality.

Vouchers are something that—as PTA we believe that public funds should be used to improve the education of public schools.

Mr. SCOTT. But if you have a school that is going to have the same 600 students in it one way or the other and you have taken away from the school all the sophisticated, engaged parents and the only people that are left are those students of unsophisticated, unengaged parents, what kind of education are you going to get at that school?

Ms. FLETCHER. I don't believe, I guess personally, as, you know, representing New York State PTA, that you cannot educate parents to become sophisticated and to be movers and shakers in their school systems. So if parents that are very motivated—and motivation is not necessarily linked to being educated; motivation means that you want what is best for your child and you will do everything possible to get what is best for your child. If they leave the school system I don't see it as a given that the school system will, you know, continue to fail or fail even more because if parents are really partners you may not have those parents leaving in the first place.

And also, you will have opportunity for those parents who may not really have believed that they were partners to become partners. I guess that is really kind of at the crux. If parents see themselves truly as partners, accountable for the educational success or not of their children they will become involved.

Too often they are—they feel they are just spectators. I am sending my child to school; you have him for 5 or 6 hours; he comes home and I get some kind of a report card at intervals, and I can't do anything or I shouldn't do anything about whether or not he or she succeeds.

Sitting at the table, being invited—perhaps that is the most important point that I can make. Parents need to feel that they are invited. The motivated parents will go into the school and make sure that their voice is heard. Others need to be invited in, and I believe that is the responsibility of the school system to invite parents and ask them to be partners.

Chairman HUNTER. Gentleman's time is expired.

Now I would like to recognize—

Mr. SCOTT. Mr. Chairman, can I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record studies and a letter from the National Coalition for Public Education.

[The information may be accessed at the following Internet addresses:]

[Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program
Technical Report 1998–2004:]

http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/200602_Clev_Tech_Final.pdf

[Information Underload: Florida’s Flawed Special-Ed Voucher
Program:]

http://www.educationsector.org/sites/default/files/publications/McKay_Vouchers.pdf

[Special Education and the Milwaukee Parental Choice Pro-
gram:]

http://www.uaedreform.org/SCDP/Milwaukee_Eval/Report_35.pdf

[Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program:]

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>

[MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study—Fourth Year
Report:]

http://www.uaedreform.org/SCDP/Milwaukee_Eval/Report_23.pdf

[District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: Addi-
tional Policies and Procedures Would Improve Internal Controls
and Program Operations:]

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d089.pdf>

[The statement of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under
Law follows:]

**Prepared Statement of the Lawyers’ Committee for
Civil Rights Under Law**

Chairman Hunter, Ranking Member Kildee, and members of the House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education, thank you for this opportunity to submit comments for the record regarding the May 16, 2012 hearing on “Exploring State Success in Expanding Parent and Student Options.”

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, was formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to involve the private bar in providing legal services to address racial discrimination. The principal mission of the Lawyers’ Committee is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice under law. The Committee’s major objective is to use the skills and resources of the bar to obtain equal opportunity for minorities by addressing factors that contribute to racial justice and economic opportunity. The Lawyers’ Committee launched the Educational Opportunities Project in an effort to guarantee that all students receive equal educational opportunities in public schools and institutions of higher learning. The Educational Opportunities Project seeks to maximize the potential of our most vulnerable students by narrowing the opportunity gap between low income and more affluent students, and minority and non-minority students. Our Parental Readiness and Empowerment Program specifically promotes the importance of parental involvement in curtailing the significant drop-out rate for Latino and African American youth by training parents on their legal rights with regard to their child’s education.

Our nation’s schools are the bedrock of participation in civic life, and the cornerstone of a strong democracy. All too often, however socio-economic status is the primary determinant of educational attainment and future economic success. We believe that every child must have access to a world-class education, regardless of their circumstances. Our commitment to increasing parental involvement in public

schools is one powerful tool linked to effective school turnaround and greater student achievement. It is imperative, however, that federal reform aimed at enhancing parental involvement look beyond school choice as the primary tool for parental empowerment, and implement strategies proven to empower parents to partner with and strengthen our public schools. As discussed at length throughout the hearing, voucher programs and charter school options are limited in their ability to address the need to provide quality educational opportunities for all students. Quality private and charter schools are not widely available, and efforts must be made to assist those students who lack access to such options.

Parents are the best advocates for their children, and, overwhelmingly, parents want the opportunity to be engaged in their child's education. It is only when parents are armed with knowledge and skills, however, that they feel empowered to effect change in their child's school environment. Decades of research back this assertion, and show that parental involvement can have a dramatic and positive effect on the quality of education in local schools. The overwhelming consensus is that evidence-based family engagement programming, integrated throughout the school system, can improve school attendance, school readiness, student social skills, and high school graduation rates. In fact, parental engagement is so important to student success, that lack of access to out-of school support is predictive of future educational deficits in students. Unfortunately, many parents lack access to critical information about available educational supports, and about the basic educational delivery system at their child's school.

Effective family engagement strategies require a clear commitment to parental engagement. Factors such as amount and quality of communication between parents and teachers, relationship building opportunities among parents, and timely access to data on student achievement consistently predict the degree and efficacy of parental involvement.

Federal policy plays an indispensable role in building the framework for parent involvement. Current policy already includes spending requirements for parental involvement strategies, directing districts to spend at least 1% of their Title I funds on creating opportunities for family involvement. While this has had some role in promoting family engagement practices, such efforts have been inconsistent, underfunded, and unclear in their definition. Stronger federal policy provides the opportunity to create a clear and consistent definition of parental engagement that espouses an integrated approach parent involvement and emphasizes a community-based strategy. The most effective parent engagement programs make family involvement part of the overall educational plan, integrating engagement techniques from the classroom level up through to school administration. When schools are perceived as having a clear commitment to involving parents in the overall decision-making process, parents are more likely to seize the opportunity to become involved in their child's education.

Effective parental engagement policies must also facilitate meaningful communication between parents and school faculty. Meaningful communication encompasses both enhanced access to performance data as well as culturally sensitive outreach. For instance, parents have a right to know when their child is being taught by a teacher that is not highly qualified, what resources are available to enhance their child's education, as well as what their responsibilities are to facilitate learning outside the classroom. All too often, this information is inaccessible, or comes too late for a parent to intervene. Student achievement and teacher instruction information should be presented in a readable and comprehensible format at intervals where the data can be utilized to improve the child's instruction.

Moreover, schools must break down the communication barriers between parents and educators. Perceived power gaps are a significant deterrent to parent engagement in schools, especially in low-income and minority communities. Districts should provide professional development for teachers that emphasize a patient, culturally sensitive approach to building relationships. Parental engagement policies should facilitate structured training to encourage parents to be participants and leaders.

Parent-school partnerships are more easily facilitated when schools reflect the communities they serve, and should incorporate their communities' culture, values, and interests when designing curriculum. Parents offer a wealth of perspective and experiences that foster meaningful collaboration.

Federal policy must also monitor and track district efforts to enhance family involvement. Effective oversight and accountability is vital to ensuring schools actually commit to integrating these policies into their school's culture and curriculum.

In closing, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, The Lawyers' Committee stands prepared to work with you to ensure that the committee understands the vital role these programs play in the lives of so many of our nation's children.

While parents can feel empowered by increased school choice, school choice options alone are not the solution. We urge the committee to enhance investments in parental engagement programs that work to build the capacity of existing public schools, and to ensure all children can achieve the best possible educational outcomes. If you have any additional questions, please contact Jessica Newman, Education Law Fellow, at (202) 662-8326.

Chairman HUNTER. Without objection.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you.

Chairman HUNTER. And we have that information, too.

And I would like to recognize Mrs. Foxx for 5 minutes?

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity.

I do want to say that a group of students from Appalachian State University just came in. They are political science students and this is their first opportunity to be at a hearing, and I am really glad to welcome them to the hearing.

I am sorry that I have had to be in and out of this hearing this morning, but it is Wednesday and there are a lot of things going on around here on Wednesdays.

I do want to say to you that I—here—I learned many years ago that the—what makes a successful school is a good principal, good teachers, and parental involvement. And I say that to people all the time.

It isn't money that makes a good school. I grew up in western North Carolina in about as poor a place as there ever has been, and I say I got a really excellent education. And when you look around you see that continuing all over the country.

So I am pleased that we are having this hearing on parental involvement, and I would like to expand a little bit on the things that have been said.

Mr. Chavous, you said in your testimony that parental choice is the very definition of parental engagement. Could you briefly explain how that engagement carries on throughout the school year because of that initial choice? It seems self evident, but if you would make a couple of comments about it I would appreciate it.

Mr. CHAVOUS. Thank you very much, Congresswoman.

You know, it is interesting, when—I think I just heard from Dr. Fletcher that some parents can't become engaged or something to that effect. I have seen the opposite with parent choice programs, and in fact, in places where there is a robust parental choice program or movement in place—Milwaukee, here in D.C., New Orleans—we actually train parents on how to advocate for their children.

You know, when parents have kids in failing schools they are intimidated by the process, they are intimidated by the school. Oftentimes you have two or three generations of families who have had—who have dropped out.

But once we had these programs in place we work with organizations on the ground to train parents on how to be advocates for their children. And magic happens, and I will give you one quick example.

In New Orleans in the scholarship program we had there I witnessed 25 low-income single mothers who lived in public housing who all stood up one at a time—the program was run by them; half

of them could not read—and talked about the benefit of seeing their children in a voucher school and seeing the—their children learning for the first time, something they hadn't experienced in their lives and in many of their mothers' lives, and it motivated them—half of them to go to try to get their GED. And see, now they are not intimidated by the process and they are active participants in their child's education, and otherwise that wouldn't have happened.

Mrs. FOXX. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ziebarth, you offer several examples of actions that states have taken to expand charter schools and I am very proud to have been in the state legislature when we began the charter school movement in North Carolina. Based on your experience, what do you think are the most critical changes states can make to help provide more opportunity for students hoping to attend high-quality charter schools?

Mr. ZIEBARTH. Thank you. I think there are a few things that states can do that will have the most impact. I think one is ensuring that charter schools have the autonomy that they need to succeed, the flexibility to innovate that is core to the model. I think it is important for states to also take seriously the accountability part of the bargain and strengthen their laws to ensure that high-quality charter schools can thrive and those charter schools that aren't meeting standards are closed down.

And then I think the last thing is providing equity for kids in terms of resources. As I mentioned in my testimony, charter kids get 75 percent of the dollars that flow to students in traditional public schools, and from our perspective, ensuring that a child has all of the resources with him or her as they move from one school to another is critical.

Mrs. FOXX. Well, thank you all very much again for being here and I may have some other questions to submit to you but my time is almost up and so, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman HUNTER. Thank the gentlelady.

Mrs. McCarthy is recognized for 5 minutes?

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing. Congressman Platts from Pennsylvania and I have been working on this issue for many years.

And I want to thank Dr. Fletcher for being here today because she, on the New York State level, has been working with us to get it implemented, so I appreciate that. It is always great to have a constituent come and testify in front of this committee.

Certainly in my district I know I have underserved schools, I have excellent schools, but I do know that the parents are extremely involved and we have learned a lot of lessons over the years. So I thank you for your hard work.

There are a couple of things from hearing the testimony, Dr. Fletcher, that I want to ask you, because you have been involved in this now for a while. In order to effectively engage parents, because we heard the Honorable Mr. Chavous talk about, you know, how they have done it for the charter schools, yet I know for a fact that we are doing that in New York State on getting parents to raise their voices to have better schools. One of the things that I have

been saying for years, can you talk about how the teachers and the administrators can help support?

We have had a number of programs where we have the parents sign up that they are going to be involved in their child's education and we have seen those particular students do extremely well. So there is a big difference there.

But one of the things that I also think that is important is that a lot of people are just starting to look at now, when we—if you could give examples of effective professional development for our teachers and the leaders in family engagement practices, and should our colleges of education, which I happen to think is important, require future teachers to be competitive in family engagement practices to be able to be—to help these parents, and are we doing that in New York State, and do you see that in other areas when you are talking to other presidents of the PTAs across the country?

Ms. FLETCHER. You mean teachers, how they can successfully engage parents?

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Right.

Ms. FLETCHER. I think that we are very fortunate in New York State that some of our teacher preparation colleges have already realized the importance of preparing their teachers as they go out into the school systems to understand what family engagement is. So I can give you some examples. At the University of Rochester there is a course called "School Family and Community Relations" where the students need to take the course as part of teacher preparation and go out into the communities, engage parents in conversation, try to understand what it is parents need and want from the school system, and then go back and speak to the administrators as part of coursework to ensure that what parents and communities want is being heard.

Once you have teachers understanding how important it is for parents to have voice, as they go and become teachers in a school system it is the expectation that they will continue that. The University of Rochester isn't the only one who started those kinds of programs. The SUNY system, State University of New York system, in some of its teacher preparation courses, specifically at Potsdam, also has a similar course, "Family School Community Collaboration," where students really get to understand how important parents are in the education process, and if they are going to have meaningful achievement outcomes they need to have parents be partners in the education.

Mrs. MCCARTHY. One of the things I want to follow up on, too, because I grew up with learning disabilities, my son has learning disabilities, and I know—and I can only speak for some of the schools in my area. One of the things that we are seeing with the charter schools, that they have the ability of not taking children with disabilities or special needs, which obviously is a burden onto our public schools because they bring down the test scores and everything.

So I will throw this out there for parents of children with disabilities who do take a voucher must forfeit their rights under IDEA. They must forfeit their rights under IDEA. So with that right there I am saying that these children, and their parents are fighting to

give them the best education possible, still don't have the true choices that they sometimes need. And I think it is important to note because New York State keeps very close tabs on this.

And I—with those that supported the charter schools. The charter schools should be under the same regulations if they are not educating the children, and a lot of our charter schools are failing the children.

And I am saying let's take the best practices between our public schools and our charter schools so that we give our children the best education. And that is going to come down when the parents have a voice—and have a very strong voice—to change inside the school. And they have that voice. They vote for their school board; they vote for whoever their—the superintendent from—through the school board. So they do have voices but we have to make those voices stronger.

It is not easy when you are dealing with poverty. It is not easy when you are dealing with children that are starving when they go home. Those are social issues that need—

Chairman HUNTER. Thank the gentlelady. Her time is expired.

Like to recognize Mr. Platts for 5 minutes?

Mr. PLATTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and apologize to the chair and to the witnesses that I am going to ask a question and then run and not get to hear the answer because I was due in the Capitol 10 minutes ago.

But I first thank each of you for being here. You know, I want to emphasize that to me these issues are not political at all, and, you know, when we talk about choice, which I have supported within the public school system, I do not support vouchers that take money out of the public school system, first of all because we promised 40 percent of special ed, 1975, and we are funding less than 20 percent of that commitment, you know, so less than half of what we promised. So when we have extra dollars to spend let's keep our word first to the public schools, because when we don't fund special ed the challenge for public schools is all the greater to have smaller class sizes, to have parental engagement programs because we are not keeping our word. So if we have extra money let's keep our word first.

Also, my objection to vouchers, and it goes to what a number of my colleagues talked about, the few who get the voucher, I will acknowledge that maybe they get a better education—not necessarily, but let's assume they do—my concern is the overwhelming majority of students who are still in the school that they left. What did we do? When we give a voucher, you know, we talk about improved results for those who get a voucher.

What do we get for the 98 percent of the students who are still in that same building? I would contend we made it worse because not only did we divert funds from that schools, we took out a parent and a student, or parents and students, who are engaged students and parents, who care about education, who are committed to getting a good education for the children.

When my parents went in and fought for me to get a good education in my public school, as I do with my children in the very same school district, it is not just looking out for my kids; it is benefiting every child in that school. So when you take that engaged

student away you have taken a good role model away from the other students. When you take that engaged parent away you have taken an advocate away for the public school because our duty as a nation is to every child, not the select few that can get out and go somewhere else.

Every child that goes to that school gets a good education, so, you know, we can, you know, talk about the results of those who get away but our commitment is to everyone. And the issue here is we just don't want to do our job. You know, the D.C. schools, it is our responsibility. D.C.—the District of Columbia—is under Congress. It is easier to throw some money at a voucher program and say, “We did our part,” than to really get into the nuts and bolts of what is wrong with the school system here in D.C.

And so our focus should be getting ourselves, whether it is Congress, local school districts, state departments of education, to do our jobs and fix what is wrong in schools where there are problems, not abandon the schools for some who can go elsewhere. And that is, to me we just are—have not made the commitment or have been willing to do that.

So I do apologize. I have to run.

Dr. Fletcher, for the record, if you could expand, I know in New York that the PTA New York with the state Department of Education and the education agency and the—and the statewide PIRCs have had a great partnership of how to really promote parental engagement and how that has benefitted, you know, getting better results for the students. The proposal to eliminate all the funding for PIRCs, could you share for the record—and I apologize that I will see it in the record and not here today—how that cut in funding will impact that partnership that is already existing and working in your state and how it will be impacted if we take away that funding?

So, with that I will yield the balance of my time to the witness and—

Ms. FLETCHER. Yes, I would be happy to. We are very proud of the partnership that we started about 5 years ago with the PIRCs.

Mr. PLATTS. And, Dr. Fletcher, could I yield my time to Mrs. McCarthy? Can I yield to her—do I have to stay in the room?

And I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to leave to keep a commitment at the Capitol. Am I allowed to do that? Unanimous consent that I can—

Chairman HUNTER. Without objection.

Mr. PLATTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Dr. Fletcher.

Ms. FLETCHER. Okay. We are very proud of the partnership that has existed now for nearly 5 years with the PIRCs, and in response a little bit, what was said before, it is not that parents can't become engaged; it is that sometimes they don't know that they have the right and responsibility to become engaged.

Part of the wonderful partnership was that PIRC, through its programs and through its mission, enabled parents to have voice in their schools by actually educating them on how to do that and providing all of the resources that they needed as well as developing programs for school leaders so that they would understand the importance of and the process of getting engaged.

With PIRC we have been——

Chairman HUNTER. The gentleman's time is expired and the gentleman is no longer——

Ms. FLETCHER. Sorry.

Chairman HUNTER. I would like to recognize Mrs. Davis for 5 minutes?

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And if I could I would like to associate myself with the remarks of Mr. Platts, particularly as it—regarding the need, I think, that we have to improve all of our schools for all of our children, and I think that is very important.

I wanted to just mention, because I think it—we are focusing on parent involvement, which I happen to believe is critically important. Having been on a large, urban school district for 9 years I understand that very well.

But the reality here is that what we are seeing in schools across the country is cutting back resources. And what is so critical and so important is what is happening the school itself, whether the—some of the newest and most enthusiastic teacher are being given pink slips, whether the parent facilitator, who has been at the school for a number of years but in many cases is not degreed but is fabulous, is—what small salary she receives or he receives is, you know, is being cut. That is critical, as well.

And so I think we can't lose sight of those issues because everyone is struggling today, and what we have to do is be sure that the emphasis and that the support is there because this element of teaching is critically important and we have to provide teachers with the collaborative structure so that the tone of the school is focused on children and parents and what they are doing together. And, you know, I think it doesn't really matter what kind of a school it is, that is what is critical. And the public school system particularly is losing out right now because of that.

I wanted to turn to Mr. Ziebarth for just a second to talk about best practices as it relates to pledges that parents take, because yes, schools have responsibilities, parents have responsibilities. I think we would all agree with that. And one thing we know is that parents of public—of private school children have some tradeoffs, really, in school, particularly, I think, in parochial schools, but I think in all schools when it comes to tuition, whether kids are there all the time. I mean, there are all kinds of ways that you engage parents that you can't do in public schools.

What do you think is critical—when you look at a KIPP academy, for example, what is critical in a pledge and what do you think is possible—truly possible in the public schools when we come to this area of partnership in schools?

Mr. ZIEBARTH. Yes. I thought it was interesting, one of the other witnesses, in talking about the meaning of engagement, referenced the word "agreement," and that really is that the heart of these commitments to excellence. That is what KIPP calls them; other schools call them different things. And they really are an agreement between the school and what it pledges to do for the child as well as agreement with the parent and the student, also, so everybody is clear on what the expectations are for all involved.

And I think charters have the ability to do that because of the flexibility that is core to the model. Each school is able to tailor sort of the—what they would like to see for parent engagement and create those kinds of expectations in the school so when parents and students are coming in, and even teachers, they know about the culture of the school and how the school is—you know, fundamentally values, you know, the deep engagement of all parties, knowing that, as folks have mentioned, the research on this, knowing that parent engagement is critical to the success of the school.

And so it seems to me that that is one of those tools that—you know, part of charter schools is to be laboratories of innovation for the traditional system to take best practices and use it in, you know, the traditional public schools, and that seems to be something that is ripe for the pickings for traditional schools to be able to create similar kinds of agreements where they are able to establish strong expectations and the school culture for parent involvement.

Mrs. DAVIS. Could I ask, Ms. Eaddy-Samuel, what the trigger—and I understand Connecticut is perhaps, as you said, a weaker system—what do you see as a critical element, though, in that, because once you get to that place in the school something has to be going on there that is—where does that responsibility, expectations—where does that lie that you think is—makes a difference? And again, we are talking about student achievement here. I have seen great parental programs which, quite unfortunately, do not boost student achievement.

Ms. EADDY-SAMUEL. Right. So when I listen to about pouring resources, lack of resources—it is not about lack of resources; it is about effectively using the resources, and with the expectation of better outcomes.

So what I did notice with the parent trigger, because I, too, do parent training, and when I speak to parents I don't negotiate about the well-being of children. It is not a matter of if you're going to be engaged. That is why I look at family engagement, because at the end of the day unless you are not here every parent should be a part—or family should be a part of the child's life.

But what I am hearing is that you are asking me to sacrifice my child until it gets right. And the problem is we know what works. Replicate what works.

It is about ensuring—when I look at No Child Left Behind—we don't like to talk about it, but when you talk about adequate yearly progress, every school doesn't need to be shut down or closed; some things just need to be tweaked. And so when I introduced a parent trigger there was a level of hope. I know people don't like to say that but there really was. I actually had hope. That is why I ran with it saying, "Maybe I actually could have the power now to improve the system," because if the school environment is unsafe, if the roof is leaky, if you have moldy walls, that is not something I can control so you can't penalize me for that not being able to input.

So when families were—started to engage it is because they have seen themselves having more than just a voice. They actually had the power to change the outcome of the educational experience of their child.

So that is what the parent trigger does—did for me when it was introduced for me and that is what it does for many parents in Connecticut.

But in all fairness, parent triggers will vary from state to state because communities know what their needs are because they are in that community, so what may work for—

Chairman HUNTER. The gentlelady's time is expired. Make sure we get through everybody.

Ms. Woolsey is recognized for 5 minutes?

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I have been here a long time and charter schools were just sort of a dream of some when I first was elected in—and sworn in in 1993, so it took me a while before I visited my first charter school, and I am going to tell you, small class size, individual learning plans, parental involvement, as the three concepts of making sure that any school—any charter school would be successful.

Well, you know, I left there with tears in my eyes because every kid, like Mr. Platts just said, every kid in every school in this country should have those opportunities and those privileges. So I have been more on the side of, if we know this as we have learned from the good charter schools, the successful charter schools, that this is what we need then why are we not doing it and why are we then saying, "We need to lead—learn more from other experiments." I mean, it works. The good programs work. They belong in the public schools. If private schools want to—I mean, and have their own ways of doing things without public money that is up to them.

What we are doing today is talking about parental involvement, so one of my major concerns, however, about charter schools—and we have learned over the years that the concern is real—charter schools, because they don't have to, do not enroll students with disability—disabilities and—English learners at the same rate as their neighboring public schools. We have also heard that parents of students with disabilities and English learners currently do not have the opportunity to even make that choice because charter schools can't meet their needs.

So if part of parental engagement is school choice then shouldn't—I guess I am asking this of you, Mr. Ziebarth—shouldn't all parents have the opportunity to send their child to any school and, like the public schools, shouldn't charters schools be held accountable for results for their English learning students, for the disabled students—measureable for annual progress, like the public schools.

Mr. ZIEBARTH. The short answer is yes. And I just want to be clear that public charter schools are legally obligated to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. They are legally obligated to provide services to English language learners, and that like traditional public schools I think charters have faced some challenges with the right way to do that, particularly when they get 75 cents on the dollar to traditional schools.

But I think over time if you actually look at the national data charter schools serve a higher portion of English language learners than in traditional schools and a slightly lower portion of students with an IEP. Over time those gaps have closed, as charters have learned, I think, how to create economies of scale by partnering

with other schools and even partnering with districts to provide special education to students.

So I think it is one of the challenges facing charters, is how to provide those services, particularly on the limited resources. But I think we are seeing progress in many states and their ability to—

Ms. WOOLSEY. Would you object to measurable standards that are equal to public school standards for all charter schools, public and private?

Mr. ZIEBARTH. So, from our perspective measurable standards would be the results for the kids, and charters should be accountable for the results of their students, whether they have IEPs or not. And so those are the things that we focus on because there are some charter schools that actually opened with a specific mission, for example, to serve autistic kids.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Well, right. That is the charter. That is their goal, and their aim, and thank heavens.

Mr. ZIEBARTH. Right. So I think there—and there are some charters that, you know, that is their mission and so they are going to have very high percentages, they are—other charters that—

Ms. WOOLSEY. I am talking about the neighborhood school that kids—parental choice, that they would have a choice to go to the charter school that does not oftentimes provide those services. That is my concern.

And I also have another concern, and that is for you, Dr. Fletcher.

Chairman HUNTER. Unfortunately, the gentlelady is out of time.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Oh. It just went off.

Chairman HUNTER. Like to recognize—unless there are any other folks here—questions or—closing statement from the ranking member?

Mr. KILDEE. Well, first of all, I think it is very important. This issue is going to be with us for a long time, and we are probably never going to resolve a system that is in place, could last forever. But I do appreciate the fact that we have witnesses here today who can speak for the type of educational institution. I myself have a proclivity towards the traditional public school system because I do think it has served this country well. My children went to a school. They were four, five, and six when I came to Washington 36 years ago, and they were able to go to school out in Fairfax County. That is a very good school system.

The problem is that we don't really have, under any of the systems we have today or a combination thereof, equality of opportunity in those schools. I have a charter school in—I have several charter schools in my district, one of which is superb except that to get in that school is very, very difficult. So there are people who have to drive by, look at it, but can't get in there. And I would like to see the quality of education in your traditional public school and your charter school and your voucher school guarantee that they are going to get the very best education possible with the very best teachers, and that is not happening now under the present system.

So I think all of you would want as the ideal everyone getting a good education. The question is, are all three of these giving that equality of opportunity?

I still have my preference for the public school system with all its defects, but it does—it is universally available and we should not take money away from that school system to send to another school system which can be very selective in its clientele.

But I thank all of you for your input here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman HUNTER. Like to thank the ranking member.

And thank all of you for taking time today. I think it is kind of interesting, you find a bunch of folks up here, who will ask Dr. Fletcher a lot of questions and say that—somehow turn this into a voucher argument. You find some folks up here that are interested with a certain way or style of institutional learning that they grew up with and are familiar with and like, but I think the answer is, as Mr. Chavous said, you have got to fix the airplane while you are flying it.

It is whatever works. I think it is interesting, I think we are learning in education now there is a new generation, a new model, a new paradigm of do whatever works and for whatever that is to work the parents have to care about it. If the parents don't care about it you could have the greatest institution in the world and it won't do anything because the parents don't care or the kids come home, they sit on the video games or they don't—the parents just have no inclination to enforce homework or anything else. I think that is the interesting side of this.

Mr. Chavous also said this is politicized, and it is. This today became a voucher argument for some people, which is insane. When all we are talking about is getting more parental involvement it seems that some people are almost scared of parents being more involved and taking the reins out of the government's hand, whatever that is—federal, state, or local, and saying, "I am going to take care of my kids and I am going to get them what they need." And I think that is what this debate should have totally been about and say how do we get parents to care finally and to do something about this, because the state will never care for your kids like parents care for their kids.

So anyway, I just want to say thanks for being here. This is something that we hope—I hope you take out of our hands, because we aren't going to do this for you.

I will not care about your kids and you won't care about my kids. That is just how it is. We all care that they get a good education but we don't have the involvement with them, the love for them, the time for them, that you do. We want you to take this out of our hands and make sure that your kids get educated and we can empower you to do that but we don't need to rescue you your way; we just need to let you go and do what it is you know how to do.

So with that, again, thank you to all the witnesses today for being here. And with no further business the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:38 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

