

Congress from the great state of Colorado would recognize and congratulate the Terrace Community School in Florida is because I have visited the school and heard its principal, Mr. David Lourie, speak eloquently about its successes.

On March 27, 2000, the Education Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing at TCS entitled, "Putting Performance First: Academic Accountability and School Choice in Florida." Chairman Pete Hoekstra of Michigan conducted this hearing as part of his Crossroads 2000 project, a continuation and expansion of his ground-breaking education investigation, which culminated in the Education at a Crossroads report. As a member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee and a passionate education reform advocate, I have attended several Crossroads hearings to find out what is working and what isn't in education across the country.

The latest installment of this important examination of American education took us to Florida, where we heard about the exciting efforts to raise the academic achievement for all students, implement school choice, increase school accountability, empower parents and improve the Florida education system. At the forefront of education reform in Florida are the state's charter schools. Specifically, the Terrace Community School (TCS) is an outstanding example of what education can, and should, be.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you a few facts about TCS and its successes. First, TCS bills itself as a "public school of choice." To some, that may be a contradiction in terms, to others, a threat, but to me, it represents the first step toward a free-market education system whereby parents can choose the best school for their child. TCS will only remain a "public school of choice" if it remains free of federal government intrusion and regulation, and if it satisfies its customers—parents and students.

To date, these two criteria are being met. In terms of freedom to educate, Florida Governor Jeb Bush and Lt. Governor Frank Brogan have been national leaders in liberating education from the shackles of government regulation. In addition, Members of Congress like Chairman HOEKSTRA and me have worked tirelessly to ensure charter schools remain free from the tangled web of federal government involvement. And, TCS is clearly meeting the needs of its customers. According to its 1998–1999 annual shareholder report, or education prospectus, of the 118 students who completed the 1998–1999 school year, 112 have re-enrolled for 1999–2000, a return rate of 95 percent. This is an unequivocal demonstration of value. Further, when surveyed by TCS, the parents clearly endorsed the education taking place there. Ninety-five percent of parents are very satisfied with their child's experience at TCS, while ninety-three percent felt the teachers and administration are fulfilling the mission of the school.

Second, the mission of TCS is crucial to its success. The very first objective of TCS is to provide a foundation of knowledge which will allow students to have successful academic careers. Elaborating on that point, TCS states, "We believe that all children can learn and that children will rise to the high expectations

of their parents and teachers." And what does TCS teach? "We offer the students the opportunity to be challenged by a rigorous, classic core curriculum taught in a planned progression by teachers who stress abundant practice and careful feedback." Finally, recognizing that education involves more than just books, the TCS "founders believe that, in addition to a strong academic program, a school should help guide each child to develop his or her character." This is clearly a blueprint and commitment to effective, excellent education.

Third, I am pleased to report TCS has been successful in meeting its stated goals. For example, the class of 2002 raised their median national percentile on CTB/McGraw-Hill's "Terra Nova Multiple Assessments Test" in every category tested—reading, language, math, science and social studies. In math, TCS students jumped a remarkable 13 percentage points. The class of 2001 also achieved exceptional results on Terra Nova, showing gains in all subject areas, and an 11 point increase in science. Finally, the class of 2000 demonstrated growth in all but one subject area, and improved its overall Terra Nova score by 10 percentage points. On another measure of student performance, the math FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test), TCS fifth-graders outperformed a majority of their peers in the county and across the state.

Charter schools must prove they are fulfilling their educational goals and that their students are, in fact, learning. They must do so, first and foremost, to meet their responsibility to educate children, to satisfy the terms of their charters, and to keep their customers, the parents, satisfied and willing to reinvest their most precious resource, their children, in the school. There can be no question TCS is achieving its goals and meeting its customers' needs.

As catalysts for positive change in children's learning, parents' options, school system quality and state reform efforts, charter schools are the vanguard. As exemplified by the Terrace Community School in Tampa, Florida, or the Liberty Common School in Fort Collins, Colorado, charter schools provide a desperately needed alternative to the failing government-owned monopoly schools. However, we must guard against overzealousness at the federal level. Charter schools have been successful because they have been free of the U.S. Department of Education and federal bureaucrats. Charter schools succeed and thrive today because of the strength of state charter school laws and because of the leaders in these schools.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the efforts of Mr. Laurie, the teachers, parents and students of TCS, and hope their achievement, optimism, and freedom continue unabated for many years to come.

THE NEW MEXICO FIRES

HON. JOE SKEEN

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 18, 2000

Mr. SKEEN. Mr. Speaker, as most of you know New Mexico has had a series of terrible

fires sweeping throughout forests in the past few weeks. My good friends and Members of Congress from New Mexico, HEATHER WILSON and TOM UDALL, have done an excellent job of informing us of the impact the Los Alamos fire has had on the citizens of northern New Mexico. As the fires continue to burn, we hear stories that make the New Mexico Congressional delegation proud and honored to represent and serve the citizens of the Land of Enchantment. In the days and weeks to come, many stories will surface regarding the efforts of the citizens of New Mexico and we will be relaying them to our good friends in the U.S. Congress.

Today I'd like to talk about the United States Post Office and the work and sacrifice they made to help keep our New Mexico communities together. Following the evacuation of Los Alamos and the surrounding area, thousands of residents were displaced to shelters, hotels, motels and homes across northern New Mexico. They were separated from their neighbors, their friends, their pastors and priests. They were separated from their children's teachers, coaches, scout leaders and den moms. They did not know what they would find when they would be allowed to return home.

However, something wonderful happened. Congress was not involved, an Executive Order was not issued, and no declaration was made by a public official. Instead, the United States Post Office decided to begin operating an outdoor Post Office where these refugees from the fire could come each day and collect their mail. They could meet their neighbors, their friends, their ministers, and the countless numbers who had been displaced. They could share information, they could console those who have lost their homes and they could provide support to each other. This temporary outdoor Post Office became the heart and soul of a city in exile.

Each day the Postal Service Letter Carriers, their supervisors, the window clerks and the leadership of the US Postal Service stepped up to the plate for New Mexico. I think all the citizens of New Mexico support me when I say thanks to the United States Postal Service for insuring that the mail got through and thank you for your help in holding a community together.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN ELIAS BALDACCI

OF MAINE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 18, 2000

Mr. BALDACCI. Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, May 17, 2000, I traveled to Michigan to be with my friend and colleague, BART STUPAK and attend the funeral of his son, BJ. Over the past few years, I had the opportunity to meet BJ and play some baseball with him. He was a fine young man, and his death comes as a great shock to all of us. My thoughts and prayers continue to be with BART and his family as they struggle to cope with this tragedy.

As a result of my travel, I missed four votes. Had I been present, I would have voted in the following ways.