

Graduation is the norm in our schools, and it is the expectation. Fifty-two of the eighth graders—OSP students—graduated this past year. Over the last 2 years, 39 students graduated from Archbishop Carroll High School, and this year we have 122 students enrolled at Carroll, with 30 expected to graduate this spring. That means 69 students will have graduated from high school this spring. And of those 39 who have, 38 have been accepted to colleges and universities throughout the United States. And the acceptance rate at Archbishop Carroll High School is 98 percent. This is a program that works. And the students' success is the data and the testimony that stands for this program.

Today, I'd like to comment on the contribution of Catholic education, highlight some of the Archdiocesan support for accountability and accountability measures, and summarize why it is imperative for this legislation to be authorized.

We ask you, as stewards of the Nation's capital, to recognize that the home of the U.S. Congress is only as strong and vibrant as the educational choices provided for all of its citizens. No government should allow the right to choose a quality education to be cut short by the limits of personal income or the lobbying of unions.

As you know, Catholic education has a well-deserved and national reputation for excellence, spanning nearly 300 years. And many of you, your colleagues in Congress, and some of our country's most famous leaders, are graduates of Catholic education, including you, Senator Durbin, as well as Vice President Biden, Speaker of the House Pelosi, Congressman Boehner, the late Tim Russert, and the late Senator Kennedy. You're all evidence of the call to service and commitment to others that the Catholic education provides for this country. In fact, who among us in this room can say that they have not been touched by someone who has received a Catholic education and that person has helped to change your life? The graduates of Catholic schools live out the social justice mission of serving others as leaders and outstanding contributors to our country.

So, when it comes to accountability, the reason we are successful is because Catholic schools throughout the country and in the Archdiocese of Washington fully support accountability measures in education. And as the superintendent, I fully support the need to monitor, report, and compare measures for student outcomes. It is understood that this may require additional testing with the Opportunity Scholarship students to ensure they are benefiting from our quality education and we are wisely spending the taxpayer dollars.

However, we need to share with you some of the reasons why we're currently unable to do this ourselves. That is, these concerns that we have do not preclude our participation but, rather, we'd like to help inform the discussion on how the methodology is constructed.

Today, we are looking forward to the passage of the Scholarship for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) legislation, sponsored by Senator Lieberman, and co-sponsored by Senator Collins, Senator Alexander, and others.

And recently I have had the opportunity to work with Chancellor Rhee, and look forward to working with Chancellor Rhee and the

Department of Education so that we can design the best model to meet the research needs of the public, and support the education of all of our children.

In conclusion, the Archdiocese of Washington has a proud history and longstanding commitment to serving all students. In fact, in 2004 this Archdiocese joined Mayor Anthony Williams and stepped up in support of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

We made seats available, and the Archdiocese and our parishes have subsidized every Opportunity Scholarship student in our schools, making up the difference between tuition revenue and cost, as we do for all students in all of our schools. Why? Because the program only pays for tuition and fees, not the total cost.

We also know that research, both internally and externally, has demonstrated continued growth and mastery in reading, language arts, and growth in math, as well, especially for those students who remain in the program for 3 years. It takes time to change.

Parents, students, citizens, the majority of the D.C. council, favor this program. And just 2 weeks ago, we heard Michelle Rhee say how important it was that this program continue, and that she and Mayor Fenty support this program. Why? Because the District of Columbia is not capable of absorbing these students if the program were to end in June 2010. Given the status of the D.C. schools, the enormous deficit the city faces, the current cuts just announced 2 hours after her testimony 2 weeks ago, DCPS will not be able to provide equitable and quality education for these students who are currently growing and succeeding in our schools.

In fact, President Obama noted to Secretary Duncan, quote, "To use only one test when deciding what ideas to support with your precious tax dollars, it's not whether the idea is liberal or conservative; what matters is, does it work?" And we know this program works.

So, on behalf of the Opportunity Scholarship students and their families, I strongly urge this subcommittee and Congress to support the SOAR legislation.

We are called by our commitment to social justice, and therefore, we must recognize that the 8,000 families who've applied for this program over the past 4 years are families who have a right to choose a quality education. And it should not be limited by their income. They are certainly, as we know, not limited in ability.

For any child, but particularly for a child coming from a marginal life of poverty, success depends on more than academics and test results. We know what comes when a child develops a sense of self-worth: Dignity, respect, and self-confidence. This is the dignity of choice through scholarship. This is the culture of respect and hope that our schools provide for these children: Hope for the future, hope for the District of Columbia, and hope for the Nation. As Archbishop Donald Wuerl stated, "It is difficult to envision what political advantage would outweigh—in the scale of human lives"—children's lives—"these young people, their future, their hope. In making political choices, the faces, futures, and hopes of the kids must come first."

This must be about the children, not the adults. Children, and their families deserve and need these Opportunity Scholarship. And today I say to you, the children are depending upon you, and

we hope that you'll move forward and support the SOAR legislation.

Thank you very much.
[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PATRICIA WEITZEL-O'NEILL, PH.D.

Thank you, Senator Durbin and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Archdiocese of Washington in support of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and on behalf of the nonpublic educational sector in support of continuing the legislation that supports the three-sector initiative as approved by Congress 5 years ago. The Opportunity Scholarship Program has afforded over 1,700 children each year the right to choose to change the course of their futures. I am proud to confirm that the Archdiocese of Washington has supported this program by providing seats for approximately 900 to 1,000 students each year, in the academically rich, welcoming and safe environments provided by our schools.

A HISTORY OF EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

As you know, Catholic education has a well-deserved national reputation of excellence and service spanning nearly 300 years. Many of you, your colleagues in Congress, and some of our country's most outstanding leaders are products of Catholic education, including Senator Durbin, Senator Landrieu, the late Senator Kennedy, as well as Speaker of the House Pelosi, Congressman Boehner and so many others. You are all evidence of the call to service and commitment to others that Catholic education has provided to this country. In fact, who among us has not been touched by someone who was educated in a Catholic school and has made a difference in our lives? Quite simply the graduates of Catholic schools live out the social justice mission of serving others as they become contributing members of society.

Catholic education has a rich history in our Nation's capital, where the first Catholics arrived in this region in 1634, and by the late 1700s, the first Catholic schools were flourishing and had established the foundation for education in what is now the District of Columbia.

Since those early days, there has been a deep commitment by the Catholic Church to ensure all children have access to a quality education. In 1799, the Sisters of the Visitation at Georgetown Visitation offered a weekly Saturday school to any girl who wanted to learn, including slaves, even though it was illegal at the time to teach a slave to read. Today this school serves Opportunity Scholarship students. In 1813, Father William Matthews, the pastor of St. Patrick's, not only supported Catholic education, but also joined the board of trustees for the fledgling D.C. public schools. For 31 years, he worked tirelessly to raise money and establish a public school system. Fr. Matthews recognized that we all share in the responsibility of educating children and part of that responsibility is to not inhibit or preclude options.

In 1858, St. Augustine School was established to serve the black community, 4 years before public education became mandatory for black children in our Nation's capital. In 1949, 5 years before the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ended desegregation in public schools, Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle integrated the Catholic schools in our Nation's capital. In 1951, Archbishop O'Boyle opened Archbishop Carroll High School—the first integrated high school in the city to open as an integrated school and the high school that has served Opportunity Scholarship students since the program was initiated. Today, 21 Catholic schools continue this legacy of faith, hope and learning for thousands of children throughout our capital city.

Today, on behalf of our school families I come to ask for your support for the Opportunity Scholarship Program so that the Archdiocese of Washington and other nonpublic schools may continue to serve those families most in need in the District of Columbia. We are proud to be part of this innovative three-sector initiative to improve education for every child in the District of Columbia and we ask you, as stewards of the Nation's capital, to recognize that the home of the U.S. Congress is only as strong and vibrant as the educational choices provided for all its citizens. No government should allow the right to choose a quality education to be cut short by the limits of personal income. In fact, just the other night in his remarks to the joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama stressed that we the citizens of this country "do better when there is choice and competition." The archdiocese's commitment to the Opportunity Scholarship Program is about providing the opportunities for all families in the District of Columbia to exercise their right to choose the best education for their children.

PROGRAM HISTORY—AN OVERVIEW OF HOPE

When the Opportunity Scholarship Program was proposed 5 years ago, the Archdiocese of Washington committed up to 1,000 seats for the low-income families the program would serve. We did this out of concern that enough seats might not be available once the program was approved. We opened our doors, welcomed the children, adjusted our staffing, increased our financial support for those schools and have successfully educated these children. As the program administration took shape, the schools adjusted to the Federal regulations and reports, and the children and families worked to adapt to new surroundings and higher expectations. After 4 years the program is working and the students have proven themselves capable, committed, enthusiastic and grateful for the new-found hope for a brighter future. As one recently put it, "The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has changed my life and has made me the successful young man standing before you now. I credit this program greatly for my success."—Ronald Holassie, Archbishop Carroll High School student, June 2009

The best measure of success for our high schools is graduation and the percentage of graduates who are accepted to colleges and universities. At Archbishop Carroll High School, over 98 percent of all seniors are accepted to college. Only 48 percent of D.C. public high school students even graduate. Since 2007, 38 out of the 39 OSP students who have graduated from Archbishop Carroll have been accepted by multiple college and universities.

The individual stories of success are many. In 2008, Opportunity Scholar Tiffany Dunston was the class valedictorian. She is now a sophomore at the University of Syracuse. Current Opportunity Scholar Ronald Holassie serves as the deputy youth mayor for the District of Columbia. Others are excelling in debate, drama, music, athletics and academic programs that rest on the shoulders of a very dedicated and highly qualified faculty. It is our hope and expectation that these success stories will continue, so long as Congress lets them.

This past year 879 OSP students were enrolled in Catholic schools: of these students, 94 percent were African American and 80 percent were non-Catholic. After 3 years, research shows that "the OSP had a positive impact overall on parent's reports of school satisfaction and safety." (IES Report, April 2009). Our parents recognize the significant changes in their children's personal and academic growth as they flourish in new communities where no distinctions are made regarding one's scholarship status. During this short time we have witnessed 8th grade scholarship students graduate yearly and move to their high school of choice, with most continuing in Catholic high schools.

All 21 Catholic schools in the District of Columbia participated in the Opportunity Scholarship Program this past year, except for the Joseph P. Kennedy Institute, which is an ungraded school serving persons with disabilities and operated by Catholic Charities. All full-time teachers hired to work in Catholic schools possess bachelor's degrees or the international equivalent and many more have earned master's degrees as well as the PhDs and the EdDs. We are extremely proud of our faculty and their commitment to the vocation of teaching in Catholic schools.

All Catholic school buildings have certificates of occupancy, and all provide safe, secure and welcoming learning environments.

OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS, TUITION AND COST

This program was initiated with the requirement that the scholarship would pay only for tuition and fees. Yet, in reality, tuition at participating parish-based Catholic schools does not cover the cost of educating a child. Therefore, at the outset and as the program grew, the archdiocese and all nonpublic schools have had to face the issue of increasing costs. The Archdiocese of Washington and parishes supporting schools have had to subsidize the difference between scholarship revenue and cost. On the average, the Catholic Church of Washington has contributed about \$3,000 for each OSP student in an archdiocesan-supported elementary school. The deficit is greater at the high school level, where it costs \$13,000 per student to be educated at Archbishop Carroll High School, yet the scholarship's amount has remained at \$7,500.

The archdiocese has chosen to support the Opportunity Scholarship students, just as the church has chosen to support all students who attend our schools. We do this through the generosity and commitment of donors, parishioners and the wider community in the Archdiocese of Washington. This is the legacy of Catholic schools in the District of Columbia.

This is about the opportunity for low income families (average income under \$24,000) to exercise their right to choose a quality education for their children. It is not about money—the money does not go to the schools or parishes or arch-

diocese. The check is made out to the families and allows them the dignity to decide where their children will go to school and then with this scholarship, to pay for their children's education just as more fortunate families pay for their children.

Yet the reality must be addressed. Without Congressional support, there is little chance that the large number of students who are now dependent upon these scholarships will be able to continue in these schools past June 2010, the end date of the program. Losing these scholarships will profoundly harm these children by forcing them from their schools; create abrupt enrollment loss in several participating schools, thereby de-stabilizing the schools for the future; and have an immediate and significant financial impact on the District of Columbia.

Grandfathering the current students is not enough. With the loss of OSP students currently in the eighth grade or seniors in high schools, schools will experience significant decreases in enrollments and tuition revenues as there will be no new OSP students. The archdiocese and the schools do not have the funds to provide scholarships for the many poor students who would have replaced the graduating students if the program continued.

Without the new legislation, 86 percent of these OSP students will have to return to schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress as measured by No Child Left Behind. Research has indicated that a return to these environments will set these children back academically at least a year and surely undo the significant gains achieved to date. Moreover, as the program ends and large numbers of OSP students transfer out of their schools, these schools will be endangered and may have to close as enrollments decrease and tuition to cover student costs disappears. As 1,700 displaced OSP students crowd public schools city-wide, this exodus will cost \$25 million plus \$54 million in lost funds allocated annually to the three sectors—a total cost of \$79 million. With a projected \$800 million shortfall predicted for next year, it is unlikely the District of Columbia will be able to meet the need.

ACADEMIC GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

After 3 years of study, Patrick Wolf, the lead researcher for the U.S. Department of Education's outcomes analysis, recently reported that "the D.C. voucher program has proven to be the most effective education policy evaluated by the Federal Government's official education research arm so far" (Wolf, Hoover Institute). Based on the trends within the data, he expects the positive gains in scores to continue to increase. The study has not yet been completed.

The major study for the Department of Education by the Institute for Education Sciences found that after 3 years students offered scholarships and those using their scholarships had significantly higher levels of reading achievement than students not offered scholarships. ("The Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years," presented by the Institute of Education Sciences for the Department of Education, March 2009.) Students who have been in the program the longest have the most improvement and are reading at a level of 1.5 years ahead of those not offered scholarships. The study also found, consistent with the previous first and second year studies, that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program had a positive impact on parents' perceptions of school safety and on parental satisfaction.

Although criticism continues regarding the lack of statistically significant gains in the math scores, Dr. Wolf and others have noted that OSP students' math scores are in fact improving and that these improvements are not happening by chance alone. Further experts from Harvard suggest that "private schools boost reading scores more than math scores for a number of reasons, including greater content emphasis on reading, the use of phonics . . ." (Hoover Institute, August 2009). It is my opinion, based on my experience in our schools, and as witness to conscious instructional decisions, that no child can achieve significant gains in math unless he or she can read. The students coming into this program arrived reading below grade level and the focus of all interventions has been on reading and language skills. It is the goal of our inner city schools that all students read at grade level by grade three. In fact, ACT has noted that if children are literate at grade eight they will succeed in high school and beyond. Literacy is one of the most important measures of future success (ACT press release, Preparation by Eighth Grade Critical to College and Career Readiness, December 10, 2008).

Academic success is a hallmark of Catholic education and is continuously reviewed in all Catholic schools by multiple measures of assessment. These outcome measures are shared with parents and used by teachers to improve instruction and achievement. All parents receive reports and participate in discussions regarding assessment results and next steps to support the students.

All archdiocesan elementary schools annually measure academic growth and achievement for all students. The Terra Nova is the standardized assessment used by the archdiocese to measure concepts, processes and objectives derived from national standards. The test was normed from a national cross section of more than 300,000 students in both 2000 and 2007 and the Terra Nova is standardized with a random sample based on geographic region, school size, socioeconomic status and ethnicity within public, parochial and private schools (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2009). Analysis of these results focuses only on our student data, employing internal peer student comparisons and working to align test results with archdiocesan academic standards.

In keeping with the archdiocesan commitment to measuring academic success and creating a culture of academic accountability, the Archdiocese of Washington will employ a hierarchical linear growth model for analysis beginning this academic year. This approach allows all schools to track student progress based on established growth targets. The target scores are composite scores based on national norms, grade levels and local characteristics. Allowing for continuous instructional improvement, this state-of-the-art model provides the most accurate data necessary for the archdiocese to measure student progress over a span of time and in the context of each individual student's performance. These measures will be used to analyze test results for all students, including the OSP students.

The Archdiocese of Washington fully supports accountability in education and unequivocally supports the need to monitor and report student outcomes with the Opportunity Scholarship Program. This would mean including additional testing to ensure that OSP students are not only receiving a quality education but that taxpayer money is being spent wisely and appropriately. However, we cannot support these measures without openly discussing the reasons why we are currently unable to do this and our concerns regarding the potential burden placed on students and schools to meet these requirements. These concerns are not meant to preclude our participation, rather to inform and help develop the best process to measure and monitor student achievement.

While the Catholic schools have undertaken many steps to assure accountability, we do not participate in a uniform common exam, simply because the cost is prohibitive and Federal guidelines exclude Catholic schools from using Federal funds to support development of accountability measures. As such, funding for resources to pay for common exams will be necessary in new legislation. The archdiocese welcomes the opportunity to compare our results with other populations. In fact, the Catholic Schools Office for the archdiocese has been actively seeking ways to compare all students, not just OSP students, to students in their local jurisdictions. Currently we are waiting for a proposal from CTB/McGraw Hill (author of the Terra Nova) on building a conversion scale that would allow our students' Terra Nova scores to be statistically equated to the DC-CAS and the State of Maryland assessment, the MSA. (Both State-based assessments are designed by CTB/McGraw Hill and normed to State standards particular to D.C. and Maryland.)

In addition to the Terra Nova, all archdiocesan OSP students currently take the Stanford Achievement Test—Version 9 (SAT-9). This data is used for the academic achievement research and analysis conducted by the Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences. This was the test of choice for the District of Columbia schools at the start of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. This is a nationally normed test and the data has been used to compare the treatment and control groups and has required all OSP students and control group students in D.C. public schools to take a second standardized test each year.

As the Opportunity Scholarship Program moves forward, the archdiocese recognizes the need to participate in the continued research protocols designed to assess learning outcomes. I have spoken with Chancellor Michelle Rhee, and agree with her regarding the need for both of us to be consulted by the research provider as the design and delivery of all research protocols are developed. I support an assessment of the academic value added by participating schools on a school-by-school basis based on the appropriate testing of participating eligible students using an agreed upon assessment protocol for both the nonpublic and public schools. These assessments would be based on the strongest possible research design and would, to the extent possible, test students under conditions that yield scientifically valid results. This suggests that OSP students' test scores be compared to the scores of DCPS students who attend the school that the OSP students would have attended based on his or her home address.

Our concerns with administering the DC-CAS to our OSP students are two-fold. First, if the DC-CAS is the test of choice, all analysis must control for the reality that the DC-CAS is aligned to District of Columbia Public School standards; standards not shared by the archdiocese. Our curriculum is aligned to the archdiocesan

standards. DC-OSP students would need to be provided the same preparation materials, coaching and time as the DCPS students. Second, administering the DC-CAS to our OSP students would place a potential burden on them in relation to their classroom work time, with a potential of almost 20 days of testing. We will need to examine how to monitor testing and ensure the best use of taxpayer dollars and student time.

Our Catholic schools will participate in the research required by new legislation and understand the importance of comparing OSP students to those in schools they are not attending. We agree that we must ensure that the program is successful as defined by ensuring a safe school environment, parent and student satisfaction and the ability to provide an education that allows students to consistently be prepared for high school and beyond. We look forward to the passage of the SOAR (Scholarship for Opportunity and Results) legislation and the opportunity to work with Chancellor Rhee and the Department of Education to design the scientific model that best meets the research needs of the public, and yet supports the education of all children in the District of Columbia.

Finally, as we look at the achievements measured by the Department of Education and the lead researcher's comments, we must note that Dr. Wolf has referenced the fact that when a student transfers from one school to another, it takes at least a year for the child to adjust to his or her new surroundings. During that time, it is anticipated that the child's test scores will drop. If the program does not continue, close to 1,700 students will be set back after 4 to 5 years of verifiable growth measured by standardized testing.

CITIZENS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM

Over 8,000 D.C. families have applied for scholarships since the program began in 2004, with 3,000 children served. In July 2009, a survey of 1,001 registered D.C. voters demonstrated that more than 80 percent of District parents of school-aged children support the program. These families know that the chancellor and mayor are working to improve the public schools but they also know, as Michelle Rhee has noted, that "despite the progress of the last 2 years, the situation remains dire when less than half of our students can read, write and do math at grade level" (Washington Post, July 24, 2009). It is very difficult for families to transfer to schools that are successful and many lose out on the lotteries for seats at public charter schools or successful public schools (i.e. Janey Elementary). The Chancellor also acknowledged that although vouchers won't solve all problems, they are an important part of the "choice dynamic" and at this time the voucher program "continues to make sense" (Washington Post, July 24, 2009).

The D.C. Council agrees with the Chancellor and the several thousand families that rallied in front of the Wilson Building in support of this popular program. On June 22, 2009, the majority of Council members of the District of Columbia sent a letter to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Mayor Fenty expressing support for the continuation of the Opportunity Scholarship Program. After citing the success of the program, the seven council members stated: "We believe we simply cannot turn our backs on these families because doing so will deny their children the quality education they deserve."

It is time for the Congress to accept the facts and recognize that failure to support Opportunity Scholarships would put the future on hold for the children and families of the District of Columbia. Passing this legislation now will only cost a few million dollars compared to the billions spent on welfare and stimulus packages. Investing now will make a difference.

The statistics are indisputable. While the per-student cost in the D.C. public schools is the third highest in the United States, test scores continue to be among the lowest in the Nation. Ninety of 123 public schools are under some form of Federal notice to improve while the majority of the District's teenage public school students attend schools that meet the District's own definition of "persistently dangerous" due to the number of violent crimes. Today many of these schools hinder opportunity and do not ensure access to competitive education in the future. The Chancellor is to be commended for the leadership and vision she has brought to the public schools. It is our sincere hope that she will continue to be empowered to bring about the much needed changes and continued improvement in all public schools. We support her work and the work of the charter schools. Together we all provide options for our families and the Chancellor must be given the time and support necessary to improve these schools for all children. Until that time, we need the Opportunity Scholarships and the funding provided for both the public schools and the charter schools as outlined in the legislation.

In an address to Congress, President Barack Obama noted, "good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite . . . to ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education—from the day they are born to the day they begin a career." The Opportunity Scholarship Program is providing "a pathway to opportunity" and the right to choose a good school for the poor children in the Nation's capital. And just as our country has historically provided Federal funding for students to attend Catholic colleges and universities, with such programs as the Pell Grants, the National Defense Education Act, the GI Bill and the TAG program here in the District of Columbia, we also should make the same opportunities possible for students in elementary and high school.

Neither public nor charter nor Catholic schools can educate everyone effectively. Each student is unique and has unique learning needs. Catholic schools exist for the purpose of meeting specific needs and expectations as described in our teaching mission statements, just as public schools exist to meet the unique needs and expectations for an educated and informed public. Without programs like the Opportunity Scholarship Program, we endanger both missions, and the potential for families to choose a public, charter or nonpublic school. As the current administration works to improve education in the District of Columbia, the added expense of a sudden influx of over 1,000 students will become an unnecessary burden, while Catholic and nonpublic schools will become the exclusive right and privilege of the wealthy. This leaves the future generation of D.C. residents weakened and denies the opportunity for access to success to both those students who need and deserve a great public, charter or Catholic (nonpublic) school.

CONCLUSION

The Archdiocese of Washington has a proud history demonstrating our commitment to serving the students in the District of Columbia. In 2004, this archdiocese stepped up in support of a new program, made seats available, and participated in extensive reviews and research. The program covers only tuition and fees, not the total cost per pupil. The archdiocese and the parishes have subsidized every Opportunity Scholarship student attending our schools. We do this because we are committed to making a difference in the lives of the children.

The research both internally and externally has demonstrated continued growth and mastery in reading, language arts and subsequently growth in math and other subjects. Parent reports testify to the overwhelming satisfaction of families and the significance of safe and secure environments, where each child is respected and honored. The students have lobbied, rallied and testified before the D.C. City Council and here in the halls of Congress. The students want to continue in this program. The D.C. City Council has written to the Secretary of Education asking for his support.

Our schools have complied with all regulations and look forward to continuing the research based on testing and comparative methodologies. The District of Columbia is not capable of absorbing these students, given the status of the schools and the enormous deficit the city faces. The funds requested to support this program are very little when compared to the billions of dollars in new Federal grants recently released (July 24, 2009) by Secretary Duncan as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These are funds that may make a difference in the future, but will go to adults, not to families—not to children. The cost of this program is a drop in the famous stimulus bucket and yet it is the program that works. President Obama noted that he expected Secretary Duncan to "use only one test when deciding what ideas to support with your precious tax dollars. It is not whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works." This is the one successful program that logic and reason requires everyone to support.

On behalf of all Opportunity Scholarship students and the families in the District of Columbia, I strongly urge Congress to support the Opportunity Scholarship Program as a part of the three-sector initiative and described in the SOAR legislation proposed by Senator Lieberman. As noted in this testimony, we are called by our commitment to social justice to recognize that the 8,000 families who have applied over the past 4 years are families whose right to choose a quality education for their children is limited by income, not by ability. Unlike the majority of Congress or the Secretary of Education and the President of this country, they do not have the means to choose the best neighborhoods with the best public schools, or the best private schools. For any child, but particularly for a child coming from a life of poverty, success depends on more than book learning. It comes when a child develops a deep sense of self worth, dignity, respect and self confidence. This is the dignity of choice through scholarships. This is the culture of hope that our schools provide for these

children. Hope for the future. Hope for the District of Columbia. Hope for the country.

As Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl has written, "It is difficult to envision what political advantage would outweigh—in the scale of human lives—these young people, their future and their hope. In making political choices, the faces, futures and the hopes of these kids must come first."

The children and their families need the Opportunity Scholarship Program. All who have been entrusted with the responsibility for the future of this program must vote to fully fund the legislation. The children are depending upon you.

Thank you.
Senator DURBIN. Mr. Cork.

STATEMENT OF GREGORY M. CORK, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Mr. CORK. Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Senator Collins, and Senator Alexander.

My name is Gregory M. Cork. I'm president and CEO of the Washington Scholarship Fund, the organization that administers the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, otherwise known as the OSP.

Thank you for permitting me to further address the subcommittee today regarding WSF's administration of the OSP.

The subcommittee has raised important questions and issues about the program, and I am eager to engage you on these issues and to address each of them.

WSF shares your goals, Senator Durbin, to provide low-income District students and families the best possible chance at a quality education and a rewarding future.

First, I want to assure the subcommittee that every dollar of Federal funding applied to the OSP, and every OSP student, and every OSP check, and every OSP school, is fully accounted for. We respectfully ask that the subcommittee sit down with us and engage us in a productive dialogue toward resolving and questions you might have about the OSP or our administration of it.

Following the subcommittee's September 16 hearing, we provided you with OSP student data and explained why there might be differences between this information and the information you gathered directly from OSP schools. Further, we provided you with thorough information and documentation in response to your written requests from this past Thursday, September 24. Collectively, the information and documentation we provided you reflect: One, that our OSP Scholarship payment processes and all of our other systems, procedures, and controls are meticulous and in full accordance with the Federal OSP authorizing statute; two, that the information that we provide to OSP families is detailed and useful; three, that WSF exercises sound oversight over OSP schools, meets with them regularly, and has close and productive relationships with them; four, that the vast majority of our participating schools are accredited or are in the process of receiving accreditation; and five, that our processes for handling scholarship payments, including when a student leaves or enters a school during the school year, are explicit, comprehensive, and even impressive in their attention to our role as stewards of Federal dollars.

We are confident that our administration of the OSP is sound. But, perhaps more important, external validation of the quality

and value of the OSP, and WSF's administration of the program, is well documented and utterly reliable.

The federally mandated evaluation of the OSP has demonstrated that there have been real academic gains for OSP students and that OSP families are thoroughly satisfied with educational options they've never been given before.

WSF has received clean A-133 audits for the first 4 years of our administration of the program, and we fully expect a fifth clean audit for 2009, the fifth year of the program.

The School Choice Demonstration Project's focus group study reports that this program has met low-income families' educational and social needs and expectations in unprecedented ways. As the project noted in its focus group report, "Parents give WSF a lot of credit for the way the OSP has been managed and the care and attention they've received from WSF staff." They cite WSF as playing an extremely important, if not indispensable, role in supporting their transition from underperforming to higher functioning schools.

And the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the GAO, in its year-long audit of the OSP, found not a hint that Federal dollars were being applied in anything other than a responsible manner. In fact, in close cooperation with GAO, WSF has implemented the GAO recommended procedural mechanisms that have helped WSF provide yet further quality service to OSP students and families.

Most important, Senator Durbin and members of the subcommittee, the success stories of our families abound. And I encourage the subcommittee to ask participating parents directly about their experiences in the program.

I'm honored that one of our parents, Ms. Anquanette Williamson, has joined me here today. She's fighting for an educational experience that's best for her children. Ms. Williamson wanted a safe environment for her kids, Dayonte who's a sixth grader, and Donae, in first grade, both at the same OSP school. She wanted good academics, and she wanted a convenient location. And she wanted Dayonte, the first of her children in the OSP, to be challenged.

Since he's been an Opportunity Scholar, Dayonte hasn't gotten straight A's yet, but there have been improvements in his grades each year. Ms. Williamson says that Dayonte is—and I quote her here—"more interested in school and more engaged with his teacher. His teacher stays on top of him." She also really likes that she can be so directly involved in her children's educations. And she has been, as all of us at WSF know.

Better, Ms. Williamson says this, "This should have been here when I was in school. I would have been so much more, today. In fact, I'm thinking about going back to school, myself."

Here's what we at WSF ask: Why shouldn't all low-income District residents, while they await the very promising, but likely years away reforms for D.C. public schools, get the same shot Ms. Williamson and her kids are getting through the OSP?

We understand that local support is critical to the OSP. WSF could not be more gratified by Mayor Fenty's and Chancellor Rhee's support of the OSP as they work toward, not only good, but great public education system in the Nation's capital. Meanwhile, we also appreciate the support of the District City Council members, a ma-

majority of whom have endorsed the OSP in a letter to Secretary Duncan and Mayor Fenty.

I'd like to acknowledge that with us today here in the room is former City Council member Kevin Chavous, who's been a tireless champion of the Three Sector Education Reform Initiative and of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, directly.

And finally, as you noted, Senator, former Mayor Williams was not able to be here today. But, at his request, I am going to read just one statement from his prepared testimony that I think particularly illustrates why so many D.C. leaders are fighting for this program. Says former Mayor Williams, "K to 12 education in the District of Columbia, though it has a long way to go, is undergoing a transformation worthy of its status as the world capital. Our Mayor is aggressively changing the status quo in public schools. Our public charter schools represent the templar for the other cities. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is giving greater voice and empowerment to low-income families, with proven success for children. Thank you for making this possible, and keep it going."

Thank you, very much. I'd be happy to answer your questions now.

Senator DURBIN. Mr. Cork, I asked my staff for a copy of your statement, and I don't believe we received one—that you just made for the record. If you'd be kind enough to share it with us, if you have additional written copies of what you just read?

Mr. CORK. Happily. Yes.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GREGORY M. CORK

Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Collins, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. My name is Gregory M. Cork. I am president and CEO of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF), the organization that administers the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (the OSP).

Thank you for permitting me further to address the subcommittee today regarding WSF's administration of the OSP. The subcommittee has raised important questions and issues about this program, and I am eager to address each of these.

WSF shares your goal, Senator Durbin: To provide low-income District students and families the best possible chance at a quality education and a rewarding future.

First, I want to assure the subcommittee that every dollar of Federal funding applied to the OSP, and every OSP student, and every OSP check, and every OSP school is fully accounted for. We respectfully ask that the subcommittee sit down with us and engage us in a productive dialogue toward resolving any questions you might have about the OSP and WSF's administration of it.

Following the subcommittee's September 16 hearing, we provided you with OSP student data and explained why there might be differences between this information and the information you have gathered from OSP schools. Further, we have provided you with thorough information and documentation in response to your written requests from this past Thursday, September 24. Collectively, the information and documentation we have provided you reflect:

- That our OSP scholarship payment processes and all of our other systems, procedures, and controls are meticulous and in full accordance with the Federal OSP authorizing statute;
- That the information we provide to OSP families is detailed and useful;
- That WSF exercises sound oversight over OSP schools, meets with them regularly, and has close and productive relationships with them;
- That the vast majority of our participating schools are accredited, or are in the process of receiving accreditation;
- And that our processes for handling scholarship payments—including when a student leaves or enters a school during the school year—are explicit, com-

prehensive, and even impressive in their attention to our role as stewards of Federal dollars.

Second, we are confident that our administration of the OSP is sound. But perhaps more important, external validation of the quality and value of the OSP, and WSF's administration of the program, is well-documented and utterly reliable:

- The federally mandated evaluation of the OSP has demonstrated that there have been real academic gains for OSP students, and that OSP families are thoroughly satisfied with educational options they've never been given before.
- WSF has received clean A-133 audits for the first 4 years of our administration of this program, and we fully expect a fifth clean audit for 2009, the fifth year of the program.
- The School Choice Demonstration Project's focus group study reports that this program has met low-income families' educational and social needs and expectations in unprecedented ways. As the project noted in its focus group report, parents "give [WSF] a lot of credit for the way the OSP has been managed, and the care and attention they have received from WSF staff," and cite WSF as playing "an extremely important, if not indispensable, role in supporting their transition" from under-performing to higher-functioning schools.
- And the U.S. Government Accountability Office (the GAO), in its year-long audit of the OSP, found not a hint that Federal dollars were being applied in anything other than a responsible manner. In fact, in close cooperation with the GAO, WSF has implemented the GAO-recommended procedural mechanisms that have helped WSF provide yet further quality service to OSP students and families.

Third, most important, the success stories of our families abound, and I encourage the subcommittee to ask participating parents directly about their experiences in the program.

Among these parents is Anquanette Williamson, who is fighting for an educational experience that's best for her children. Ms. Williamson wanted a safe environment for her kids—Dayonte, who's a sixth grader, and Donae, in first grade, both at the same OSP school. She wanted good academics and she wanted a convenient location—and she wanted Dayonte, the first of her children in the OSP, to be challenged.

Since he's been an Opportunity Scholar, Dayonte hasn't gotten straight A's yet, but there have been improvements in his grades each year. Ms. Williamson says that Dayonte is—and I quote—"more interested in school and more engaged with his teacher. His teacher stays on top of him." She also really likes that she can be so directly involved in her children's educations—and she has been, as all of us at WSF know.

Better, Ms. Williamson says this: "This should have been here when I was in school. I would have been so much more today. In fact, I'm thinking about going back to school myself."

Here's what we at WSF ask: Why shouldn't all low-income District residents—while they await the very promising but likely years-away reforms for D.C. Public Schools—get the same shot Ms. Williamson and her kids are getting through the OSP?

Finally, and on this count, we understand that local support is critical to the OSP. WSF could not be more gratified by Mayor Fenty's and Chancellor Rhee's support of the OSP as they work toward not only a good—but a great—public education system for the Nation's Capital. Meanwhile, we also appreciate the support of the District's City Council members, a majority of whom have endorsed the OSP in a letter to Secretary Duncan and Mayor Fenty.

Mr. Chairman, I now welcome the opportunity to engage you and the subcommittee in a constructive dialogue around your questions and what's best for low-income D.C. families seeking a quality education for their children.

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC, September 24, 2009.

Mr. GREGORY M. CORK,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Washington Scholarship Fund, Washington,
D.C. 20036.

DEAR MR. CORK: I am writing to invite you to testify at a hearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government to examine and evaluate the use and impact of Federal appropriations provided to improve the education of children in the District of Columbia.

The hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, September 29, 2009, at 10:30 a.m. in Room SD-192 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building. The Subcommittee has received your

written testimony from September 16, 2009, and I would appreciate having additional information about the Opportunity Scholarship Program as outlined below by Monday, September 28, at 3 P.M.

- The number of voucher students in each participating school, tuition, and total enrollment, for each year of the program, at three points during the school year: beginning, middle, and end.
- Which participating schools are accredited, and by what accrediting body.
- Records of all school visits, including dates and times, over the life of the program.
- The information the Washington Scholarship Fund supplies to parents on each participating school.
- The handling of scholarship money for a student who drops out of a participating school during the school year.

I ask that your oral testimony be limited to no more than 5 minutes, to allow ample time for dialogue. Your written testimony may contain additional details and will be included in the hearing record in its entirety.

If you have any questions regarding the hearing, please contact Marianne Upton at (202) 228-6374. I look forward to your participation in this hearing.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. DURBIN,

Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government.

WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP FUND,
SEPTEMBER 28, 2009.

The Honorable RICHARD J. DURBIN,

Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510-6025.

DEAR SENATOR DURBIN: By this letter, the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) wishes to provide information and documentation addressing the additional questions and issues raised by you and your colleagues at the September 16 hearing before the Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government and in subsequent correspondence. This letter responds to your request for additional information of September 24, supplements my September 21 letter, and responds to inquiries raised by Subcommittee members on September 16.

There is compelling external validation that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (the OSP) has been of immense value to low-income District families, in terms of both academic achievement and parental satisfaction. As you are aware, several studies of the OSP—most notably, the Federally mandated evaluation of the program undertaken by the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES)—have found very positive evidence of significant academic performance improvement and that OSP parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the program. In the initial years of the program, participants in the OSP have substantially benefited from improved: Academic achievement; parental engagement; classroom discipline and safety; student motivation; and parental satisfaction.

Dr. Patrick Wolf, the independent evaluator of the OSP, concluded that in its initial years the program has "met a tough standard for efficacy in serving low-income inner city students."

Over the initial 5-year OSP authorization period, WSF has taken more than 8,000 applications from low-income District families, many with children in failing schools, seeking Opportunity Scholarships. To date, more than 2,600 students from low-income families have been able to use an Opportunity Scholarship in a District private school. For 2008-2009, the average income for participating families was just \$24,312. And 86 percent of scholarship students come from the attendance zones of D.C.'s lowest performing schools (Schools In Need of Improvement, Corrective Action or Restructuring, as designated under No Child Left Behind).

We are encouraged by the progress of the OSP to date and by the extent to which those on all sides of the political divide are committed to working in good faith on this issue. We strongly believe that the sole focus should be on the education of the children of the District of Columbia. We were impressed by Chancellor Michelle Rhee's statement to this Subcommittee that "part of my job is to try to make sure that every single school-age kid gets an excellent education and I'm not really as concerned with what kind of school—whether it's a private school, a D.C. charter school, or a DCPS school—as long as they are in an excellent school getting a great education, then I'm happy." We share Chancellor Rhee's pragmatic focus on "what works" for the children of the District of Columbia and are pleased that she agrees that the Opportunity Scholarship program continues to have an important role in the current "tri-sector approach."

Of course, we also recognize that there is room for improvement in any program; thus, we welcome a dialogue about possible changes that could further improve the academic achievement of OSP students and result in higher participation by quality schools. Toward that end, this letter addresses the questions and issues raised by the Subcommittee in the following five areas: (1) OSP student enrollment data, (2) the handling of scholarship money for students who withdraw from a participating school during a school year, (3) WSF's responsibilities for oversight of participating schools, (4) school accreditation, and (5) WSF's dissemination of information concerning academic standards.

Student Enrollment

At the September 16 hearing, you requested that WSF provide you with a list of OSP scholarship payments, by student (but not by name) and by school, for the 2008-2009 school year. Attachment A to this letter is a list of OSP payments for the 2008-2009 school year by unique student identification number. The list includes students who did not attend a school for the entire school year, and thus would have received only partial scholarships at one or more schools. This is the most accurate method of measuring yearly student participation in the OSP.¹ From Attachment A, each OSP dollar expended can be traced to a specific student and to a specific school.

Your letter of September 24 also requested the number of OSP students in each participating school for each year of the program, at three points during the year (beginning, middle, and end). For informational purposes, WSF has traditionally compiled two "snapshots" of student enrollment each school year, in late September and late June and we provide these "snapshots" of school enrollment for the past two school years in Attachment B.² These discrete data points serve as benchmarks as to the number of students being served in the program and as gauges of the net attrition that has taken place during the school year. These snapshots are subject to subsequent reconciliations to reflect the inflows and outflows of students over the course of the school year, as discussed in our September 21 letter, and also will not include students who enroll after late June each year. Thus, any review of the expenditure of Federal funds on the Opportunity Scholarship program should be based on the detailed data set forth in Attachment A, instead of the "snapshot" data in Attachment B.

Repayment of Scholarship Funds for Mid-Semester Student Withdrawals

Your September 24 information request asks for information on the handling of scholarship money for students who withdraw during a school semester. Attachment C is an excerpt from our Program Policies and Procedures Manual setting out our detailed procedures for making scholarship payments and recovering from the schools the appropriate amounts when a student withdraws mid-semester. As set forth in the Manual at page 3, all tuition and fees (except up-front fees, such as books) "are pro-rated to the day" for withdrawing students.

When a student withdraws mid-semester, the school is required to repay a pro rata amount of tuition for the semester, calculated on the basis of the ratio of the days the student was enrolled during the semester to the total number of days in that school's semester. The formula used is—

Amount of tuition refunded =

¹ Upon its completion of its program audit, conducted in 2006 and 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) instructed both WSF and the program evaluators to report final school-year enrollment figures based on the number of students who received a scholarship payment—whether full or partial—during the course of a school year. Consequently, the final year-end attendance figure for a given school per GAO measures will typically be higher than the enrollment figure for the beginning of the school year, as it reflects normal enrollment shifts as students enroll in a school after the year has started, leave a school before the end of the school year, or switch schools within the program and therefore receive payments at more than one school in a single school year (effectively resulting in some students being "counted twice" for enrollment purposes—i.e., once for each school at which the student was enrolled during the school year). For the 2008-2009 school year, full or partial OSP scholarship payments were made for a total of 1,721 students.

² Despite diligent efforts, we unfortunately are not yet able to submit this information for the first 3 years of the program, but will submit this information to the Subcommittee as promptly as possible. Similarly, your September 24 letter also requested total enrollment and the tuition for each participating school for the 5 years of the program. This information was submitted for the 2008-2009 school year in my letter to you of July 29, 2009, but we have not yet been able to compile this information for prior school years. We will, of course, submit this information to the Subcommittee as soon as possible. Please note that our information about total enrollment in each participating school comes from the schools themselves and that we have this information only on an annual basis, not at three different points during the year.

$$(\text{Amount of tuition Paid}) - \left[\frac{(\text{\# of semester days that have passed as of the date of withdrawal})}{\text{\# of total days in the school's semester}} \times (\text{tuition amount up to } \$7,500) \right]$$

The same formula is used to determine the allocation of any fees for ongoing programs, such as before-school or after-school programs.

WSF's Responsibilities for School Oversight

Under the D.C. School Choice Act (as recently amended), WSF currently has oversight responsibilities with respect to participating schools in the following areas:

- Financial responsibility of participating schools. See D.C. Code § 38-1851.04(b)(1)(H).
- The commitment of participating schools to a policy of non-discrimination. See D.C. Code §§ 38-1851.04(b)(1)(G) & 38-1851.07(a).
- The commitment of participating schools to charge equal tuition to OSP students. See D.C. Code §§ 38-1851.04(b)(1)(G) & 38-1851.06(a)(1).
- The commitment of participating schools to provide information about OSP students' academic progress to the independent evaluator (this information does not go to WSF). See D.C. Code §§ 38-1851.04(b)(1)(G) & 38-1851.10(a).
- The commitment of participating schools to provide annual reports to parents about (a) their own child's academic achievement, (b) the aggregate academic achievement of other OSP students at the school in the same grade or level, (c) the aggregate academic achievement of all students at the school in the same grade or level, and (d) information about the safety of the school. See D.C. Code §§ 38-1851.04(b)(1)(G) & 38-1851.09(c).
- The obligation of participating schools to have valid certificates of occupancy issued by the District of Columbia and to have only teachers with 4 year bachelor's degrees teaching OSP students in the core subject matter areas. See Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, Public Law 111-8, Title IV, Division D (District of Columbia appropriations).

Outside these areas of oversight entrusted to it by statute, WSF currently has no authority to decline to allow a parent to use a scholarship for the "District of Columbia private elementary or secondary school of their choice." See D.C. Code § 38-1851.06(a)(1).

An important management tool that WSF has used to carry out its oversight obligations under the statute is a detailed school agreement, which sets out all of a participating school's obligations under the statute and contractually obligates the school to comply with each of these requirements. See Attachment D. Each school leader is required to sign a school agreement in each year of the school's participation in the OSP and to provide appropriate documentation (such as copies of a valid certificate of occupancy).

WSF's School Oversight Program has established policies, procedures, and controls for each of the elements that contribute to the coordinated implementation of the OSP. The key documents capturing these policies, procedures, and controls are provided here as attachments, as follows:

- School visit procedures (Attachment E).
- School payment procedures, as discussed above (Attachment C).
- Financial controls governing Federal funds (Attachment F).

If a problem arises through these control mechanisms or is reported through other channels to WSF, we will investigate the issue and determine whether the school is discharging its obligations under the statute. To date, the participation of one school has been terminated due to WSF's concerns about the school's financial responsibility and WSF has worked closely with other schools where financial concerns existed in order to ensure that Federal funds were not being placed at jeopardy. In addition, WSF has notified two schools this year that they do not qualify for participation in the OSP due to their failure to obtain valid certificates of occupancy.

Your September 24 information request also requests information about the records of all school visits, over the 5 years of the program. A listing of the school visits over the past 3 years is attached as Attachment G; we have not yet been able to assemble earlier records of school visits but will do so as soon as possible (some visits were handled through a contractor in the earliest days of the program, so it may not be possible to assemble a comprehensive listing of school visits over the life of the program). A copy of the form used to gather information during school visits is submitted as Attachment H. We will also be supplying the Subcommittee with copies of records of all school visits; however, as we know the Subcommittee

has expressed its concern that it not be provided with identifiable information about specific students, it is important that we review these forms prior to providing them to the Subcommittee. Once this review is completed, we will promptly submit the forms (with confidential information redacted).

Accreditation

Members of the Committee raised questions concerning District of Columbia laws concerning accreditation of private schools and concerning the number of schools participating in the OSP that are accredited. District of Columbia law does not require private schools to be accredited. However, at present, in order for school attendance to be acceptable under the District's compulsory attendance law, a private school must either (a) be accredited (or in the process of becoming accredited) by one of a list of approved educational accreditation organizations or (b) submit proof acceptable to the Superintendent of Education as to the amount of instructional time, the character of the instruction, and the qualifications of the staff. See D.C. Code of Municipal Regulations, Chapter 21 § 2100.³

Based on our research and information provided by the schools, it appears that of the 54 schools currently participating in the 2009-2010 OSP, 39 are accredited, 5 are in the process of seeking accreditation, and 10 are not accredited. Thus, at present 72 percent of the schools participating in the program are either accredited or in the accreditation process. Attachment I sets forth, as requested in your September 24 information request, which participating schools are accredited and by which accreditation bodies. In addition, Attachment J sets forth a summary of academic information (such as student-teacher ratios, average class size, and the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees).

Academic Standards

The purpose of the authorizing statute is to afford low-income District residents the options to choose from expanded and better educational opportunities. Under the authorizing statute, WSF is not currently authorized to exclude a private school that OSSE allows to operate from participation in the OSP. However, in order to help OSP families choose the best school for their children, WSF provides families with a wide range of information on participating schools, including information on areas that are widely accepted as instrumental in contributing to a child's academic growth and achievement. In addition, WSF strongly encourages each parent to personally visit the schools they are considering for their children.

Your September 24 information request asks for "[t]he information that the Washington Scholarship Fund supplies to parents on each participating school." The annual School Directory provides detailed information to families about each participating school, including information on the facilities, curriculum, faculty and staff, transportation options, and the mission of the school. See Attachment K (2008-2009 School Directory). In addition, each family is provided with a booklet on "How to Use Your Scholarship" that provides practical advice and information to assist the parents.

It is important to note, however, that the written information provided in the School Directory has been only the beginning point for WSF's communications with parents. During the 2008-2009 school year, WSF had a staff of eight case managers whose primary duties were communicating with parents, in order to equip them with a detailed base of knowledge about the educational options for their children. During the last school year, these WSF staffers had more than 25,000 telephone conversations in addition to in person meetings with parents, to help them to make the best educational choices for their children.

The School Choice Demonstration Project Report on "Family Reflections on the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program," states that parents "give [WSF] a lot of credit for the way the OSP has been managed, and the care and attention they have received from WSF staff," and cite WSF's communications as playing "an extremely important, if not indispensable, role in supporting their transition" from under-performing to higher-functioning schools.

Conclusion

Again, we wish to emphasize our commitment to the low-income children and families of the District, and our gratification at the tremendous progress made by OSP students and the deep satisfaction of their parents with the program. Indeed,

³We understand that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on August 7, 2009, asking for public comments on the elimination of the requirement of accreditation or proof concerning the academic instruction.

the OSP has received more external validation than any school choice program in the nation.

We look forward to exploring every means by which to continue both this critical education reform initiative and the vigorous review that measures program results and validates the program's authorization.

We hope the information provided herein and the attachments to this letter are helpful toward addressing the questions and issues raised by you and your colleagues at the September 16 hearing. Again, we very much would appreciate the opportunity personally to meet with you and your staff, at any time convenient to you, to review together all relevant information concerning the OSP and to address and resolve any and all questions and concerns that you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

Sincerely,

GREGORY M. CORK,
President & CEO, Washington Scholarship Fund.

Attachments are being retained in the subcommittee files.

Senator DURBIN. Thank you very much.

And let me say, at the outset, that I thought that Superintendent Rhee was very forthcoming and honest in her appraisal of the current state of D.C. public schools. And what she said—she told me privately, and said it publicly—she could not look a parent in the eye, in Washington, DC, and say, "Sending your children to public schools is a better outcome, or a better choice." And she felt that she has a glide path to improve the D.C. public schools over the next 5 years, and I hope that she's correct. I thought that that was a very honest admission on her part, and it's the reason why we are coming together and envisioning this continued relationship of the three different sectors of education in the District of Columbia.

But, also, at the same time, I think we have a special responsibility, in Congress—since we have a special relationship with the District of Columbia—to account for the money spent and to ask if it's being spent well. And there hasn't been enough of that. Some of this has, unfortunately, become a matter of faith and, too often, a matter of political ideology. And that isn't fair to the kids, nor to the taxpayers. And that's the reason for the hearing, is to ask these questions and to try to come up with the right answers so that we have that on the record.

I thank you, Mr. Cork, and I believe my staff has said that the information that you provided this morning, they've gone through, and there is an accounting for the children that you said, last time, were—some questions over it. I won't go through the whole lead-up to that, but we didn't have the information; you wouldn't provide it. When we tried to gather it, there were some missing pieces. And now, I think the pieces are there, as best we can determine, and the kids are accounted for.

But, I want to go to a point that Mr. Cane raised, here. Under the public charter school experience in the District, they have turned down two out of three applicants to become charter schools. Thirty-four percent have been approved. Mr. Cork, how many schools have you turned down, in the Washington Scholarship Program, that wanted to become part of this, but you felt were not good enough to offer a quality education to children under your program?

Mr. CORK. As I've emphasized so far, no one can be more concerned about the quality of the academics in the schools participating in the OSP. To date, our experience has been that the vast majority of these schools are wonderful schools. During the course

of the program, two schools have not been permitted to participate, and for—typically, for various reasons. Finance is one of them. We do require detailed financial information from schools; and if they can't provide it, we don't let them participate.

Senator DURBIN. So you're saying, out of 59 schools that have participated in the program, 2 have been disqualified for financial reasons.

Mr. CORK. One was disqualified after beginning participation, others have not been permitted in the program at the outset.

Senator DURBIN. What percentage did you turn down, that applied to be part of the program? Mr. Cane says they turn down two out of three.

Mr. CORK. As a percentage—as I said, there were two schools that were not permitted to participate.

Senator DURBIN. Two out of 59.

Mr. CORK. Well, there have been different numbers of schools participating each year, but, as I recall, two have not been permitted to participate.

Senator DURBIN. That's a significant difference. That at least, their board would decide that two out of three really don't measure up to the standards that they think are acceptable for the children, and that, in the circumstances with your schools, that there were only two.

So, let me go to the next question. And that is this—I think—I hope I quote you correctly, Mr. Cane.

Mr. CORK. Mr. Durbin, we have carried out our oversight responsibilities over our schools very thoroughly during the course of this program. We're talking a lot about what we've done to date, and we've done an excellent job in carrying out—discharging our responsibilities under the statute. Now, we're happy to talk about what we can do better, going forward. We want—

Senator DURBIN. Mr. Cork, you've been—

Mr. CORK [continuing]. We want to help you make the schools better.

Senator DURBIN. Mr. Cork, I wish, when I went to school, I could grade myself. But, that isn't how it worked. The teachers graded me. And you would like to grade yourself as "excellent." Let's wait and see what comes out at this hearing, all right?

Two out of 59 schools were turned down, as opposed to two out of three for charter schools.

Mr. Cane, you said, "only true accountability is taking away the right to operate from nonperforming schools." I don't know if I have you quoted accurately. Is that—

Mr. CANE. That's correct.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Pretty close to what you said?

Mr. CANE. That's correct.

Senator DURBIN. And so, after you have turned down two out of three schools that want to be charter schools, you have an ongoing review of the performance of the charter schools that are part of your program?

Mr. CANE. The short answer is "yes." The way that this works is—please remember that those applying to open charter schools are not already schools. These are community members who come together, and most of them simply do not have the skills—the skill

set among them to lead the charter authorizers to think that they can run a good school. And then, after—those who do survive this rigorous application process are then subject to a great deal of monitoring by the charter authorizer of the D.C. Public Charter School Board now. And if they do not measure up over time, then they will be closed down; their students will be shifted to another charter school or otherwise gotten into school.

Senator DURBIN. And more than a quarter of all D.C. public charter schools have been closed over this 13-year period of time.

Mr. CANE. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. Because they didn't measure up.

Mr. CANE. That's right, sir.

Senator DURBIN. All right. And in terms of accreditation—and I think Senator Alexander alluded to this earlier—do you require accreditation, or an effort toward accreditation, to be part of the D.C. public charter schools?

Mr. CANE. The School Reform Act, which is the D.C. charter school law, requires that all public charter schools be accredited.

Senator DURBIN. Is it a—one common accreditation, or are there different forms of accreditation?

Mr. CANE. The bill—the law, rather—lists six or seven different accrediting entities, and then the public charter school board has the authority, under the law, to add entities. But, as a practical matter, the vast majority of the schools get accredited by the Middle States Accrediting Association.

Senator DURBIN. Ms. Weitzel-O'Neill, you've said that all of the schools in the Archdiocese are accredited.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes. The Archdiocese requires that all of our schools are either in the process, if they're a newer school—or, if not a newer school, then get—they are accredited. So, for instance, we have—St. Patrick's, out in Rockville, it's now working towards its accreditation. It's about 5 years old. But, all schools are required. But, it's required by the Archdiocese of Washington.

I think what's important is that nonpublic schools—private schools—and I think Senator Collins alluded to this earlier—do not have the oversight that we do in the State of Maryland. So, my schools, in the State of Maryland, have much more oversight by Nancy Grasmick's office—the State education office—than we do in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia does not require our nonpublic schools to be accredited.

Senator DURBIN. And, Mr. Cork, can you say that all of the voucher schools, the 59 voucher schools, are either accredited or in the process of being accredited?

Mr. CORK. Senator, as Dr. Weitzel-O'Neill noted, we don't have—the District of Columbia has the authority to determine whether a school can be opened, and we've worked very closely with the schools participating in the program, and performed our oversight over them. You asked about accreditation. The majority of the schools participating in our program are accredited.

Senator DURBIN. All the public schools are accredited, all the charter schools are accredited, all the Archdiocesan schools are accredited, and you say a majority of the voucher schools are accredited. What are we to make of the schools, which are receiving voucher scholarship money, that are not accredited?

Mr. CORK. Many of the schools are excellent schools. Our staff visit our schools regularly, and report that—

Senator DURBIN. No, you said your staff visited the schools once every 2 years. That was your testimony last week.

Mr. CORK. Actually, that is not the limit of our—

Senator DURBIN. I asked you about an onsite visit and you—I can pull out the transcript, but you said, "once every 2 years."

Mr. CORK. No. We're required to visit at least every 2 years. But our staff—our staff made 25,000 phone calls last year, Senator Durbin, on behalf of our families. Two families—our staff are in schools every single day. We have direct, personal, productive relationships with school leaders and—

Senator DURBIN. Well, that's—

Mr. CORK [continuing]. With our families.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. A little different than your earlier testimony. But, I want to—

Mr. CORK. As far as accreditation goes, it is not required by the District of Columbia. We cannot require the schools to be accredited to participate.

Senator DURBIN. So, when you testified—

Mr. CORK. We encourage accreditation.

Senator DURBIN. Excuse me, sir.

You testified that, when it came to the information that you provide to parents about the voucher schools, you provide—you were meticulous—that was in—I wrote it down, because we don't have your statement—but you said you were meticulous—detailed, and useful information. So, do you disclose to the parents of potential voucher school students that the schools they're about to send their kids to are not accredited?

Mr. CORK. We do disclose that to them, yes.

Senator DURBIN. You tell them that in advance.

Mr. CORK. Yes. We talk with the parents very thoroughly about their options, about every school, what might be best for their children. And, in fact, we've found that parents are the best people to make that choice, Senator Durbin. It's about their kids. And we trust them. We rely on them. We provide them all the information that a parent needs to make the best decision for their child.

Senator DURBIN. Well, I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues, here, but it appears, in District of Columbia here, we have different standards: standards for the public schools, standards for the charter schools, voluntary standards accepted by the Archdiocesan schools, but when it comes to voucher schools, it's a little different situation, here.

Mr. CORK. The District—

Senator DURBIN. Excuse me, sir.

It's a little different situation, in terms of accreditation. And I don't understand why—if this is a common standard, why it wouldn't apply to the voucher schools, as well.

Mr. CORK. I don't understand, either, Senator. We're happy to talk about new policies that might address this. In fact, as I believe—the charter schools have 3 years to receive accreditation in order to—is that correct?

Mr. CANE. It's actually longer. You can't even start the accreditation process until you've been in business for 3 years.

Mr. CORK. Right. So, maybe we could discuss a new policy around private schools in the District, but I cannot legislate that myself. I'm happy to talk about our experience, what we see with our schools, to work, together with you, toward a policy that's best for the kids. We want quality schools for our kids. That's the bottom line. And we'll do whatever we have to do to make sure that happens.

Senator DURBIN. I'll get into some specific schools after the others have had a chance.

Senator COLLINS.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Cork, let me follow up on the accreditation issue, because it is an important issue. The Catholic schools are all accredited. The charter schools—the public charter schools are either accredited or in the process of being accredited. Let me ask you, in a straightforward way, would you support a change in the law to require that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship schools be accredited, or in the process of obtaining accreditation if they're a brand new school, in order to participate in the program?

Mr. CORK. I think that process is worth considering. And so, yes, I would answer your question, but I would say that I'd want to see several things put in place to make it a fair process. I would want the reviewers to be experts in oversight, and to make sound—

Senator COLLINS. Well, that's part of the—

Mr. CORK [continuing]. Right, right—

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. Accreditation process.

Mr. CORK [continuing]. Right. That—

Senator COLLINS. That's their established process.

Mr. CORK. And I would want it to be fair to the schools, such that they'd have sufficient time to go through the process.

Senator COLLINS. Superintendent, do you think that would be a good change in the law, for us to require—given the fact that we're putting Federal funds—that the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship schools be—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. Accredited?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes, I do. And I think empowering Michelle Rhee's office, as the chancellor of education for the District of Columbia, would be a good thing.

Senator COLLINS. I thought your point was very interesting, about the difference in Maryland versus the District. And I don't see the reason for that difference. I don't see the need to treat the Opportunity Scholarship schools differently. It seems to me accreditation ensures a certain level.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I think part of the issue has been the revolving door of the superintendency and chancellor, as noted by my colleague here, that we've seen this movie before. And the lack of having sustained leadership at the District of Columbia level has been part of why the rules are not clear. And I would suggest that the most important thing is that Michelle Rhee succeed and continue, and that we support her in what she needs to do, as opposed—and make sure that she's able to hold people accountable and that the unions don't keep pushing her back and push her out,

as they did with the other superintendents. We have to support Michelle.

Senator COLLINS. I certainly agree with that.

Superintendent, let me ask you about another issue that we've been contemplating, and that is, how do you do comparisons among the students in the public charter schools, the students in the D.C. Opportunity schools, and the D.C. public schools, so that we can assess the three sectors?

Now, you gave one excellent example, and that is, we can look at graduation rates. And I so commend the Catholic schools' experience with achieving high graduation rates.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Thank you.

Senator COLLINS. That is real progress for these students. And even more impressive is the high rate of college acceptance.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Thank you.

Senator COLLINS. That really is heartening to me, and that suggests that we're making a real difference. So, graduation rates are something that, across the board, we can look at. But, we don't want to wait until senior year to assess—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I agree.

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. What's going on.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I agree.

Senator COLLINS. So, that brings up the issue that Senator Durbin has, understandably, brought up many times, and that is looking at testing so that periodically we can assess how these students are doing in the three different sectors.

Now, you mentioned that you're administering two nationally normed reference tests to all of your D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program students.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator COLLINS. And personally, I think the D.C. schools ought to be using a nationally normed test, rather than the DC-CAS test. But, that's an issue upon which reasonable people can differ. So, help us figure this out. What is a fair way of assessing the effectiveness through testing? Is there a way—well, first let me say, should we require all students, regardless of whether they're in the public charter school or the D.C. Opportunity schools or the D.C. public schools, to take the DC-CAS test, or is there a way to compare the test that you give—is there a way to convert them?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Let me just say quickly, for the sake of everyone present—and Senator Alexander, you can chime in, because I know you know about testing, but there are two kinds of tests right now. Five, 6 years ago, everyone in the United States took a nationally normed test. The nationally normed reference tests are the TerraNova or the Stanford. And that allows you to rank order your students. You create—everyone who takes the test that year, their scores are rank ordered. You decide where the 50th percentile is. And what we used to do is report what proportion of students were above that proficiency level, which was always the 50th percentile. That's what everybody did. And we used these nationally normed tests, which is why, 5 years ago, the District was using the Stanford test, known as the Stanford-9. This year, they now have a Stanford-10.

So, that was chosen to do the comparison because it takes into account the variability of what you're teaching in your schools.

No Child Left Behind changed the landscape of testing dramatically. Every jurisdiction, every State—and the District is considered a State, in this case—was required to establish their own standards and their own standard reference-based test. So, a criterion referenced-based test is what you have with the DC-CAS. These tests are designed—and they're very, very good tests—they're very good tests for educators, parents, and children, because the parent is compared to himself or herself, not anybody else. What matters is my child, Maggie, doing better at the end of 1 year than she was at the start of the year. How close is she to the criteria that was set? But it's set for those schools, according to their standards.

The struggle Catholic schools are having right now across the United States is that we cannot afford the cost of creating norm-referenced tests for our students, based on our standards. So, we are still using these nationally normed tests. And in a place like Archdiocese of Washington, my archbishop would like to see a comparison, just as Senator Durbin, of how our students are doing compared to the kids in the State of Maryland, where a lot of our schools are, and in the District of Columbia. The only way I can do that now is to, hopefully, find funding for CTB/McGraw-Hill to create a scale. And that scale—a conversion scale—would allow us to convert our TerraNova test scores to the equivalent test score on the DC-CAS or the Maryland State assessment. Both tests—and this is the part that's interesting—all these tests are made by CTB/McGraw-Hill or Pearson. So, there's basically two companies that are really winning on No Child Left Behind.

So, we have a proposal in to CTB/McGraw-Hill. We're trying to find out how much it would cost. We really want to do this. If we can't—and with the Opportunity Scholarship Program—I have met with Michelle Rhee, and we both agree that we can work together to develop some scientific methodology that would allow us to compare gross scores for the students in both populations.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. That would be very helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator DURBIN. Senator Alexander.

Senator ALEXANDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks, to the witnesses. This is a very interesting testimony.

Dr. O'Neill, so you're saying that, rather than have all the kids in the private—in the Opportunity Scholarship schools take the same test that D.C. schools give, that you'd rather find a way that you and Dr. Rhee might be able to work together, to find—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. A way to convert your scores, so that we could have some information about that—or others could—parents could.

Senator COLLINS. Yes. I think one of my concerns is that, first of all, the standards that we have in our Catholic schools are the standards based more or less on the Maryland State standards and the Indiana standards—

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. And we've created them. So, what our children are required to know and be able to do at the end of third grade in math may look different than what's going on in the D.C. charter—

Senator ALEXANDER. Right.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. School or the public school. So, what they're tested on would be different.

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And so, that puts the kids in our—the OSP child to—maybe at a disadvantage. But, more importantly, the cost of preparing these students to take a criterion-referenced test—

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. Which is a very lengthy, time-intensive test—also will increase the cost of testing, and more importantly, it will take these students out of class time, when they could—

Senator ALEXANDER. So, there's a cost issue—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. There's cost—

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. That is a—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. And time.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. That is a real obstacle to—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. If the Federal Government can come up with the funding, it wouldn't—

Senator ALEXANDER. So, if we—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. As long as we don't have to come up with the funding.

Senator ALEXANDER. So, would you say, if Senator Durbin wants you to take another test, he ought to pay for it? Would that be what you'd—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. You'd respectfully say?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah. You know, you would need to pay for it.

Senator ALEXANDER. We're pretty—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I can tell you, we don't have the funding.

Senator ALEXANDER. We're pretty good, here in Congress, at coming up with good ideas for State and local groups, and not paying for it.

Now, I thought Senator Durbin—you know, I'm a big supporter of kids having choices. I mean, when I moved here, the Secretary of Education, we looked all around, and our kids chose the best school we could, you know, and the two of them are in the Opportunity Scholarship Program. So did President Clinton and Hillary, and so did President and Mrs. Obama. And, you know, we—I'd like to reduce the number of times that that decision is affected just by how much money you have. But, I thought Senator Durbin's line of questioning about accreditation was worth pursuing.

And, Dr. O'Neill, you've had experience, now, with—do you use the middle States?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes, sir. And I've served on visiting teams and—

Senator ALEXANDER. Is that a useful exercise for you? Put aside the D.C. Opportunity Program for a moment. Or is it a waste of time?

Senator ALEXANDER. Oh, no. It is a very useful exercise.

Senator ALEXANDER. It's a peer—it's basically, your peers—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. It's peer—

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. Coming in and looking—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. They're—it—

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. You over and—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah. It is peer review. But, for instance, when a school is undergoing middle States accreditation, they spend a year in self-examination.

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And they look at everything in their school. They prepare the report. A visiting team of five to six people spend 4 or 5—3 to 4 days in the school, depending on the size of the school, come out with a report, make recommendations to the leadership in Philadelphia—

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. And your school is either accredited—you also get visits—interim visits. So, for instance, St. Thomas More, in ward 8, which is in the—

Senator ALEXANDER. So, you think it's a useful—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. Useful process.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely.

Senator ALEXANDER. And, in your opinion, would it be reasonable if—for D.C. Opportunity—for us to require that—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I think it would be very reasonable.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. Children who attend D.C. Opportunity—that use D.C. Opportunity Scholarships to attend accredited schools—or schools that are in the process of being accredited?

Senator ALEXANDER. Exactly. And I would say the other accrediting system that's fabulous is the southern States accrediting agency.

Senator ALEXANDER. Now, so—while Senator Durbin and Senator Collins are here—the way I read the law, though, we may be blaming you and Mr. Cork—or, we may be blaming the D.C. Opportunity for a program—something we ourselves have done—we, in Congress. Because, as I read the law, private schools aren't required to be accredited. Is that right, Dr. O'Neill?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. At this point in time—

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. No, we're not required—

Senator ALEXANDER. But, no, you're not required to be accredited.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. But, we, as the Archdiocese

Senator ALEXANDER. But, you chose to be.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah.

Senator ALEXANDER. Is that correct?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator ALEXANDER. But, private schools in the District of Columbia, under the law, have to be approved by the board of education or the chancellor—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. But not by an accrediting association. So, you're not required to do that. And, as I read the law, it might be that—if I were a parent, and I wanted to go to a school, and Senator Durbin and Collins and I all say, "Well, the school is not accredited," I would read the law and say, "This is to enable me to attend," quote, "the school of their choice." In other words, it doesn't say anything, Senator Durbin, about accreditation. In fact, it says the parent is the chooser.

So, what we've got today is a situation, if I'm reading it right—and then I'd like to ask you, Mr. Cork, if you want to comment on this—where the law says that private schools in the District of Columbia do not have to be accredited. What they do have to do, is be approved by the board of education or the chancellor. They have to be approved by them. There are some specific requirements of what that is. And that's it. And it looks to me like it says that, if I'm a parent, that I can take my child to a school of my choice, without any requirement of accreditation. Is that the way you read it?

Mr. CORK. I share your understanding, Senator Alexander. And you're right, it's all about a parent's choice.

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah. It's about a parent's choice. That was the wisdom of Congress, 5 years ago. Now, the wisdom of Congress might now be that, having looked at it for 5 years, and Senator Durbin raising some good questions, maybe we ought to change that and say that we think that accreditation is not optional for private schools—

Mr. CORK. Yeah. And—

Senator ALEXANDER [continuing]. To participate. But, today it is optional, under the law we passed, if I'm reading the law right.

Mr. CORK. That's right. Now, we are willing to talk with you, as I said; we want to sit down and talk about what would be the best policy, going forward. Absolutely.

Senator ALEXANDER. Well, Senator Collins asked you the question—or, don't you think it would be better if you'd just go ahead and—my recommendation to you would be that, over the next few years, that you just say, "Yes, that's a pretty good requirement. Most of our schools are accredited, or are in the process of being accredited, and we'll seriously consider doing that, because that would earn the support and confidence of the people who are providing a lot of the money."

Mr. CORK. Absolutely.

Senator ALEXANDER. That would be my recommendation.

Mr. CORK. Yeah. Personally, I think accreditation is a great idea, going forward.

Senator ALEXANDER. Yeah.

Mr. CORK. Now, remember too though that meanwhile over these past 5 years we have worked very closely with our families to make sure they have full information to make the best decisions for their kids. We—again, we want nothing more than to have our participating students in good schools.

Senator ALEXANDER. Well, we have—Senator Durbin, we—you know, we have—we have Pell—this may have been an oversight by Congress that's caused this problem. We have—you know, we have Pell grants for higher education. We require the colleges and universities to be accredited. We did not require that for these schools.

Thank you for the time.

Senator DURBIN. Senator Alexander, you're correct, some of us were hoping to have standards included in the voucher schools, like college degrees and the same test, and that they would pass at least an inspection of their buildings. And those amendments were all defeated when I offered them as part of—

Senator ALEXANDER. Well, that's already in the requirement for the—

Senator DURBIN. It's in there because I included it in this year's appropriation.

Senator ALEXANDER. But I mean, as I read the requirements, the private school in the District has to go before the board of education. There are some very specific things—

Senator DURBIN. Oh, no, I'm not questioning that. I'm just saying that—I don't quarrel with what you conclude, that the law that we passed could be better. There were some of us who suggested that at the time, too.

I'd like to ask Ms. Weitzel-O'Neill—I want to make sure I understand what you said. And you talked about conversion of test scores, and so forth. I thought I understood that the Archdiocesan schools were prepared to take the same test as—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. We have—

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. The public charter schools.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. We are prepared, and have been. The Opportunity Scholarship students currently take the same test as the D.C. children who were in the lottery. Starting 5 years ago, the Stanford-9 was the standardized test all D.C. children took.

Senator DURBIN. Then my question wasn't—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. We all agreed to the same test.

Senator DURBIN. Then my question isn't clear. That you're prepared—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And the DC-CAS—am I prepared to have the Opportunity Scholarship students take that test? Absolutely, if that is the wisdom and choice of the—and as long as we can work closely with Michelle Rhee. As she and I have both pointed out, we understand the difficulties this will create for the children, but we would hope that we could work this out in a way that would make it possible.

Senator DURBIN. And can I say publicly here—and I'll stand by this—that we need to take that into consideration.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely.

Senator DURBIN. When you convert over to another test, I can understand that there could be some periods of time, here, for adjustment and reevaluation.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely.

Senator DURBIN. And so, I think there should be fairness on both sides.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Thank you.

Senator DURBIN. But I think, a common test gives us a better standard norm to measure against. And that is what has happened in the other three cities with voucher schools, and I think it should happen here.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And I would just comment that, in the other cities what is unique is that there are shared standards because of the State relationship to everyone. Unfortunately, the Archdiocese of Washington crosses State lines. And so, it's a little weird for us.

The second thing—and then I would just mention, because it would make a difference—and this is just a suggestion—but, since No Child Left Behind has splintered every State in such a way that all of our tests are different—everyone has a different test—we need these conversion scales so that these comparisons can be made for all different kinds of legislation. As you invest money in education in this country, and until Arne Duncan gets that national test and national standard set up, it's very difficult for us to make comparisons, because everybody has their own separate test in their own world. Yet, the conversion scale is mathematically possible.

And in fact, Senator, you may be familiar, but when the SAT changed, they created the conversion scale. So, if you and I applied to go back to college today, our SAT scores from not so long ago would be compared to the young people today. And their scores are way higher than ours, because it's a different test. But, there's a conversion scale that would make us feel really good about how our test scores are today. So, it works. Higher education's been using conversion scales when they change their tests. I think it's—again, as Senator Alexander pointed out, higher education has given us some very good models to look at.

Senator DURBIN. Thank you.

Mr. CORK, I'm going to ask you to revisit the Kuumba Learning Center with me, here. This is one I asked you about last time, and how frequently that that school was visited, and you said, "Once every 2 years." Today, you've said something different. Whatever the standard is, I need for you to clarify something. When you sent us the information on the voucher schools across the District of Columbia, you said every one of them had 100 percent of teachers with at least a bachelor's degree. And when it came to the Kuumba Learning Center in your directory—school directory for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, teachers with bachelor's degree or higher: 25 percent.

Mr. CORK. First, I want to clarify, I didn't say the school is visited only every 2 years. Our policy is that they are visited at least on a biennial basis. As I said, our staff are in the schools every single day, on the phone with the schools, present in the schools, and have close and productive working relationships with—I went to Kuumba, by the way, last week. I would send my kids there. I think it's a great school.

Senator DURBIN. Okay. Can you answer my question? You say that 100 percent of their teachers have college degrees here; you directory says 25—

Mr. CORK. You know what we found out? We found out that some schools, where the instructors had graduate degrees, they

didn't report them as having bachelor degrees, because they were being that specific about it. Now, the requirement that the schools have 100 percent of teachers having bachelor's degrees if they teach core subjects is new.

Senator DURBIN. It is—

Mr. CORK. And we are going to enforce it. If a school doesn't have 100 percent of those teachers with bachelor's degrees, they're not going to be in the program. We're not going to let them in. Now, as to—

Senator DURBIN. That's what the law requires you—

Mr. CORK [continuing]. As to specifically what's going on at Kuumba right now, I'm happy to work to clarify whatever questions you have, to determine whether they do have that 100-percent rate. Again, the figure you cited, I don't know if it's accurate. I suspect it's not.

Senator DURBIN. And let me—I'll just say that—on the question of bachelor's degrees, you said 25 percent in your directory, and now say 67 percent. So, I don't think the discrepancy goes to bachelor's degrees. It's a pretty significant discrepancy between what you put in your directory and what you reported to us. I'd like to clarify it.

Now, let me ask you about Bridges Academy. I don't know if we have a photo of Bridges Academy. Bridges Academy, again, you say has 100 percent college degrees. And then, in the directory, 79 percent.

Mr. CORK. You might as well take that picture down. It's the wrong school. Bridges has a brand new, sparkling facility that's absolutely gorgeous, and has for 2 years. I apologize if that was taken from our Web site. That is not the school.

And again, your question was specifically what, Senator?

Senator DURBIN. 100 percent versus 79 percent.

Mr. CORK. Again, we will clarify with you the precise—if that's wrong, I apologize for that. But, let me emphasize, you've required that 100 percent of the teachers have bachelor's degrees to be in the program. If they don't, they won't be in the program.

Senator DURBIN. We asked you earlier for records of school site visits over the life of the program, and you furnished us some charts, and you indicated that data for the earlier years was difficult to gather, since you relied on a contractor, in the earlier years, to visit the schools. Is that true?

Mr. CORK. Actually, yes, there were others doing site visits during the early going, when—there are 5 months to get the program up and running. We had a lot of people participating with us and doing all the things we needed to do.

Senator DURBIN. And do you know the name of the contractor that was involved?

Mr. CORK. I wasn't here at the time, but yeah. Fight for Children, here in the District, was administering that part of the program at the time, and site visits were conducted by them. We took them over, once we got up and running, and had the full staffing necessary to do it regularly.

Senator DURBIN. Can I ask you about the Academy for Ideal Education? Are you familiar with that school?

Mr. CORK. I am. They're not participating in the program.

Senator DURBIN. Why?

Mr. CORK. Because they don't have a certificate of occupancy.

Senator DURBIN. When did you discover that?

Mr. CORK. We've been in process with them for months. We've been working with them, and with the department of consumer and regulatory affairs, to try to determine what the issues were, and see whether one could be issued. But, apparently, they've not been able to secure a COO. So they're not going to be in the program.

Senator DURBIN. They had 84 of their 101 students on vouchers in the last school year?

Mr. CORK. Well, they're not going to have any of the Opportunity Scholarship kids now.

Senator DURBIN. They had 84 of their 101 students on vouchers in the last school year?

Mr. CORK. I don't know the specific numbers. I'd have to look at my records.

Senator DURBIN. It seems to me that if a school is heavily voucher school, it would merit more investigation and oversight. Is that a fair conclusion? I mean, Sidwell Friends and other day schools and the like may not require this type of onsite investigation, with one or two students. But, if you have a school that has an overwhelming percentage of its students on vouchers, I would hope that there would be more oversight, on behalf of your agency.

Mr. CORK. We provide you with documentation of our very rigorous school oversight procedures. There are certain triggers that result in us going to look further into a school. If there's an increase in enrollment, or more voucher kids are using, for a given year, we do. And we do go to the school and closely scrutinize what's going on there when we see any number of triggers tripped.

Senator DURBIN. How do you ensure the fiscal solvency of the schools?

Mr. CORK. We require audits from each school, when they participate in the program. And if they don't have financial audits conducted by outside parties, then we require a full set of financial documentation that demonstrates financial responsibility.

Senator DURBIN. I want to ask about one of your schools, the Ambassador Baptist Church Christian School. In the documentation you provided me in July for this school, you listed a total student body of 53 students for the last school year. Last week, your letter noted that there were 57 students receiving vouchers. We're trying to reconcile the differences in numbers here.

I've also been informed that this school is not operating this year. So, last year the school was educating only voucher students, and this year it's closed. What is the situation with this school?

Mr. CORK. As I understand it, Ambassador closed because of financial problems.

Senator DURBIN. That's it?

Mr. CORK. That's the extent of my knowledge, Senator. I'm happy to provide you with further information, once I've gathered it.

Senator DURBIN. I have a tough time reconciling—"25,000 phone calls," and "we're on top of this every day" with some of the answers that you're giving me.

Mr. CORK. You've identified two schools, Senator.

Senator DURBIN. Well, I should, because they've been closed. I mean, it really is a question.

Mr. CORK. No, one has been closed.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. It's rare—excuse me—

Mr. CORK. One has been closed.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. It's rare, that your schools are closed. And I'm asking you the circumstances, and you can't give them to me.

Mr. CORK. Well, you would think you would want a school that was having financial issues closed.

Senator DURBIN. Yes.

Mr. CORK. I mean—we didn't close the school, by the way. We're not permitted to close schools. But, the school did close, and so, it's no longer in the program.

The majority of our schools are excellent schools. I would send my own children to most of our schools.

Senator DURBIN. Mr. Cork, I'm going to have to work with my colleagues, here, to see if there will be a reauthorization of this program. And it's possible there will be. But, there will be rules at least consistent, for your program, with the public and charter schools. I mean, we've got to demand the same standards, for the sake of the children and their families, of your schools that we do of other schools, or question whether we should require them of public schools, or charter schools.

You didn't write this law, and I didn't vote for this law, because I thought it was wide open, with opportunities for misuse and for exploitation. And some of those have come out during the course of this hearing. But, in fairness to the many students who are getting good educations through this program, we have got to tighten this up. And there's going to have to be more accountability from your agency too, when this is all over. I mean, there's a lot of money passing through your agency into the District of Columbia, and I think it's important that these dollars be accounted for, whether they're in District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, whatever they may be. And I know that today you've had a little different attitude in your testimony. And that's up to you. You can do it however you wish. But, at the end of the day, we need the answers to these questions.

Mr. CORK. And we want to work with you, Senator. We want to sit down with your staff and go through every question you have. We're confident in our information. We know we can answer every question. We can, and we have, accounted for every single dollar. We take that responsibility very, very seriously.

Senator DURBIN. Thank you.

Senator Collins.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Superintendent, you mentioned the unusual situation that the Archdiocese crosses State lines, or crosses the District line. I'm curious whether the children who are enrolled in the Catholic schools in the District of Columbia follow a Maryland curriculum rather than a D.C. curriculum. Do you have the same curriculum?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. We have the—

Senator COLLINS. Curricula?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. The Archdiocese of Washington has a curriculum based on the Archdiocesan standards, which we created 5 years ago, with everyone else. And ours is a combination of the best of the Indiana standards and the Maryland State standards. At that time, those were the two best sets of standards in the country, we thought, and fit with our high expectations in our schools. On all of our schools—in fact, I'm meeting with the principals this afternoon to talk about how we use data in the classroom to make decisions and to better report our outcomes to our parents. So, we're all—we all work together, yes.

Senator COLLINS. The point that I'm trying to get at is, the DC-CAS test is geared to the D.C. curriculum.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator COLLINS. And your curriculum is more like Maryland's standards, correct?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator COLLINS. So, what I'm wondering is whether the test that would be more appropriate for your schools in the District would be the Maryland test.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. The Maryland State assessment?

Senator COLLINS. Yes.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yeah. And that, too, is criterion referenced to the standards in the State of Maryland. And since we're probably closer to that than we are to the standards in the District. But, the reality is, all of these tests, the criteria are based on standards; and the local standards are, in fact, based on national standards. So—

Senator COLLINS. Right.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. It takes a lot of work and a lot of analysis to get to this point, where you can factor out all the variability. So, yes, we can do the comparisons if this is what is mandated. It will be much more tedious and much more time-consuming for everyone involved.

And our hope is—whether we do the DC-CAS or not, whatever happens, our real hope is, is that we'll have, for our purposes, that scale that will allow us to convert our TerraNova and compare it to the Maryland State assessment and the DC-CAS, and share with our parents, and the public, how our children perform in our schools compared to the public schools in both jurisdictions.

Senator COLLINS. And that's what we want to see, also—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely.

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. Because we are investing millions of dollars. And it's an investment that I support. But we've got to be able to assess the impact of that investment on the students that we're serving. And—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. We—

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. I know you share that goal.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely. And we have looked very carefully at the Opportunity Scholarship students who have been with us over the course of at least 3 years, and we've compared their growth to the students who were not participating in the scholarship, but have been at our schools on a continuous basis. And the rate of growth, the rate of change, is absolutely the same as it is for the children who are not. So, we've seen a change of 12 percent

in math in both those students who are in the program and those students who are not in the program. So, the growth line is going in the same direction. Our goal is to have every Opportunity Scholarship student at the highest point of literacy by eighth grade, because all of the research shows, if you are literate by eighth grade, you will succeed in high school and you will succeed in college. And that's the college examination folks that have put all that data together.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Those are the best measures of success.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Ms. Levy, I have to say that I was a little worried about your testimony, because, as you pointed out, you've been an advocate and an expert on D.C. schools for 30 years. And yet, I detected a weariness, almost, and a lack of optimism.

Ms. LEVY. Uh-huh.

Senator COLLINS. So, you talked about that you've seen this movie before, that the players are different, and the terrain's a little different, and you hope the outcome will be different. That was a pretty pessimistic assessment, to me, and it worries me, because we can't have the outcome be the same. That's why I'm such a strong supporter of the D.C. public charter schools and of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

But, talk to me a little more about what you see happening with D.C. public schools, because after all, we still have an awful lot of children who are going to the D.C. public schools, and are you encouraged or discouraged by the steps that are being taken by Michelle Rhee? What reforms do you think will make the biggest difference in D.C. public schools?

Am I reading you wrong? Are you actually brimming with optimism that this is going to turn around? I've asked you several questions, but I—

Ms. LEVY. Yes.

Senator COLLINS [continuing]. I'd like you to talk further.

Ms. LEVY. I am neither optimistic nor pessimistic. I'm in a wait-and-see mode, because I have seen most of these reform attempts before. And it all depends on how they're implemented. I almost feel like I never want to hear another good idea again. If we could just take a mediocre idea, and do it well, that would suffice. It's discouraging to see good ideas, that have been effective elsewhere, adopted, implemented poorly, and then abandoned. Or, the other thing that happens is, they're adopted, they're implemented, they work, and still the next superintendent throws them out.

Senator COLLINS. So—

Ms. LEVY. And that's—we have had continual turnover—

Senator COLLINS. Too much of a revolving door.

Ms. LEVY [continuing]. Continual change. We have fired teachers over and over again. We have fired principals over and over again. We have reconstituted dozens of schools. And it's created more disruption. And I'm talking about the past. I'm not saying that it won't work this time. But, I can only wait and see.

And I am discouraged by a couple of things. I am discouraged by the fact that it is almost impossible to find out where the money is going. That should not be. We used to know better. It's never

been great, but it's always been better than it is right now. I am worried that the continual emphasis on replacing the workforce will cause our good teachers and good principals to leave. We are losing them. And there's a history that 50 percent of the new teachers we hire are gone 2 years later. That's just not a way that we can continue to operate. That's the source of pessimism.

The source of—I won't say "optimism," but—hope is that—we do need better teachers, we do need better principals, we do need adequate funding. And right now the D.C. public schools are very well funded.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. Cane, my final question, I'll ask of you.

The charter school movement in the District appears to have been extraordinarily successful, in terms of parental satisfaction and demand for slots in the charter schools. Help me better understand your ability to accommodate all of those parents who want their children to go to charter schools. Are there waiting lists? Are you capped in the number of students that are allowed into the charter school program, the way that the D.C. Opportunity Program is capped?

Mr. CANE. Well, we're not capped. The number of charter schools we can open a year is capped at 20, but we've never, ever come anywhere close to that. So, for all intents and purposes, we have no caps.

We have any number of schools—I can't give you the exact number—with waiting lists, some of them very significant. We have schools that have trouble filling up, especially in their first year or two.

I've been expecting, for 4 or 5 years, that the interest in charter schools would level off, and it simply has not done so. I'm surprised that we're at 36 percent, going to 38 percent. Fortunately, as long as we have, you know, good new schools coming in and bad schools going out, we'll be able to accommodate these students. But, I can't tell you that—I mean, at the moment, I don't know how many more students we could accommodate.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator DURBIN. Thank you.

Ms. Weitzel-O'Neill, I'd like to make a general observation—and not specific, but general observation—about what I've seen. Graduation rates are good. The higher the graduation rate, the better, because it means the student didn't drop out. College admission is good. It shows that the student still has ambition, and is advancing, and has been given an opportunity to learn at a higher level. But, I can just tell you that it doesn't tell the whole story. We have open enrollment at community colleges in Illinois. Two out of three of the students who are accepted at community colleges in Illinois are not performing at 12th grade level. They have to take remedial and transition courses in reading and math. We're going to try to teach them the high school courses in community college now, and they are going to take loans out and apply for Pell Grants to get a high school education. That's the sad reality.

So, all of the things you've said are good, but they don't tell the whole story, and the whole story is still challenging for all of us. And I don't pick on Archdiocesan schools, or any schools, but I

think we have to have some honesty about those who are college students today. Some are in good schools, well prepared to become college students, and will earn a bachelor's degree, or go beyond that. Others may not. And that reflects, I think, the challenge that we all face in every State and here, obviously, in the District of Columbia.

Mr. Cane, when I take a look at charter schools—and I believe in charter schools—I'm glad you're in business, and I'm glad you're offering an alternative. And clearly, what you've shown us is that the parents, and others, support you in that effort. You have schools that are good and some that are not as good. Some that are extraordinarily good. And I look at the charter schools and wonder what is being learned in the process.

In Chicago and in other parts of my State, when a school is failing, they try to reconstitute it. If they can't, they close the school. They don't turn the kids away, obviously, but they bring in a whole new team, to try to start over and see if they can make a difference. And, to my satisfaction and sometimes amazement, they do it; taking the same, quote, "students falling behind," and turning them around because they've got a new team of teachers and a new team of administrators, principals, and the like, that really do connect up, and things move forward.

When you take a look at the results in your charter schools, and you see—and I won't name names—but you see a wide variation in all of your charter schools here. Tell me how you look at this, in terms of the charter school movement. Are you developing a best-practices model that is going to be part of all the charter schools in the District of Columbia? Do they sit down and compare notes and talk to one another about what works and what doesn't? Are you looking for certain things, when it comes to teachers and administrators, realizing that, in the failing schools, those aren't there, but in those that succeed, you can find them? Do you ask why the KIPP schools are off the chart? Can you give me some explanation?

Mr. CANE. Well, I think if you looked into the high-performing schools and compared them to each other, they undoubtedly have certain characteristics in common, but they also have very, very different approaches to educating the kids. I think what we too often forget is that schooling doesn't go on in school systems, it goes on in individual school buildings. And there are different ways to skin this cat. So, KIPP is highly successful. No one will argue with that. E.L. Haynes is highly successful, but doesn't look, in many ways, anything like KIPP.

The Public Charter School Board, which is the authorizer and the monitor of these schools, and makes the decision on who opens and who closes, is, right now, in the process of trying to do what you suggested; in other words, they're trying to look at all these different schools in the same way, I guess, in the hopes of being able to more easily decide who's succeeding and who's failing, and what works and what doesn't, which if they don't go too far on that is okay. But, I think it's very important to remember that someone will come along, in a year or two, who may, down the road, perform better than KIPP with its students, and doesn't desire to do any of the things that KIPP is doing.

Look, we know that the schools that are doing well have a longer school day, they have a longer school year. They provide enrichment activities, like chess. They grind their teachers into dust, you know, making them work 20 hours a day. I mean, this is the reality. This is very difficult work. I believe that most people are not going to be able to hack it in—whether it's in public charter schools or DCPS or elsewhere. That's why it's so important that we keep this stream of new people with bright ideas coming in, and kicking out the people whose bright ideas didn't work. But, we do all need to remember how extremely difficult this is.

Senator DURBIN. So, I went to these Catholic schools for 19 years. They don't claim me sometimes, based on my votes. But, I went to Catholic schools for 19 years, and my impression, at least in the elementary level, was that there was a pretty standard education that was offered at Catholic schools. And there were certain things we did that maybe other schools didn't do. I have no way of comparing, but you know, they just continued using a model that they considered to be a good model, and I think it ended up, at least in my case, with pretty good results.

Now, you're dealing with some experimentation here. You have charter schools that may come to you and say, "We've got a better idea than KIPP. We've got a better idea than anybody. And we want to try this experiment in education." So, how do you decide whether this experiment is worth risking these children on such an experiment?

Mr. CANE. Well, first of all, thank goodness, I don't decide. You had Josephine Baker in here at the last hearing, and her board and staff make this decision. But, my organization focus is heavily involved in this, because we're the only people in the District of Columbia who have a formal program to help people apply for charter schools. And so, we see all of these wildly enthusiastic people with great vision and all that sort of thing coming to us every year. I think we've had 16 or 18 people asking for our help this year. And we will turn away all but two or three of those, because, although we don't make a decision on that, we get to decide who we're going to help, and we're only going to help people design schools and go through this process if we're confident that they're going to have good schools when they come out the other end. Many of these people do not—after we tell them that they don't have what it takes, many of these people decide—most of them decide not to apply. Those who do, either with our help or on their own, then have to go through an extremely rigorous application process; a 125-page application, very, very high standards. Once the application is submitted they go through a grueling interview process with the Public Charter School Board, a technical review, then they have to go through a public hearing, and then a decision is made about whether they're going to be the one out of three that makes it through that process.

Senator DURBIN. I guess what I'm driving at—and I'm glad you do just that, with that kind of rigor, determining whether or not you want to put the stamp of approval as a D.C. charter school on this new approach.

When I look at my State, particularly at the city of Chicago, whether it's in the public school area or the charter school area,

there are a lot of flowers blooming. And they look a lot different. There are some military academies in the public school system. And there are some that focus on arts. And in the charter schools, we have—I've visited charter schools that are just—San Miguel is now a charter school. It's read, read, read. And they just never stop reading. I've been to other schools that try to deal with the whole student—you know, physical education, what they're eating—as part of the education. They all have different kinds of approaches to this. And I'm wondering—there's value to it, I'm sure, because we can do a lot better in education in America. But, I'm wondering if we're ever going to come to a conclusion as to what really is the right model and approach, or is this going to continue to be a blossoming array of opportunities? That's a pretty philosophical question, but I'll let you weigh in.

Mr. CANE. Let me answer very philosophically. We're never going to get there. It's always going to be—partly it's about improvement, but, you know, in the worst school systems, at the worst time, there have always been individual schools that have done extremely well. And many school systems around the country have decided, "Okay, well it's working at this school, let's make everybody do it." And then, to their chagrin, they find that it doesn't work.

The reason that I'm working on public school reform in the charter schools is that I believe so strongly in what goes on in each individual school, and I don't believe that I or anyone else has the wisdom to decide that there's this one way and it's going to work for everybody. In fact, I think that's counterproductive. So, the public charter schools—I'm not saying that the DCPS can't reform. And I'm pulling for them to reform. But, I think that the fastest way to get reform is to find people who are willing to sacrifice themselves for a good idea and go into these schools and run them.

Senator DURBIN. All right, my last question. I know I'm getting off into the clouds here a little bit. But, if KIPP came in tomorrow and said, "We want to open a third charter school," you wouldn't say, "Wait a minute. We've got to try a new approach. We've got to experiment." You're going to say, "Great. You folks know how to do this, and you've proven it over and over." There's something going on there, at some of the best charter schools, that clearly needs to be replicated, that I hope my grandson is going to find, and others in the District of Columbia are going to find, when they go to charter schools.

Mr. CANE. You know, KIPP doesn't have any trouble getting the Public Charter School Board to allow it to open new campuses. However, the reason there aren't more KIPP schools here and around the country, and the reason that some KIPP schools have failed, hard as that is to believe, is because it's so difficult to find school leaders and teachers who believe in this, who can do this in the right way. So, you know, KIPP has a philosophy about how to do education that works for KIPP, but it doesn't even work for everybody that KIPP hires.

Senator DURBIN. Do you have Teach for America teachers in charter schools?

Mr. CANE. There are a lot of Teach for America teachers in charter schools.

Senator DURBIN. And in the—

Mr. CANE. KIPP uses them.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Public schools, as well?

Ms. LEVY. Oh, yes.

Senator DURBIN. And, Ms. Weitzel-O'Neill, when I came and visited—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Holy Redeemer?

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Holy Redeemer school, there were Notre Dame students—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Who appeared to be in a similar type of commitment, that they were like Teach for America—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. ACE teachers from Notre Dame, from the Alliance for Catholic Education, yes.

Senator DURBIN. And is it—it sounds to be a similar, parallel-type program, in terms of teachers.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes. There are a number of Catholic colleges and universities—in fact, they're meeting in Chicago, this Friday; I will be with them—

Senator DURBIN. Good for them.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. Talking about how to provide—at Loyola—that kind of support to our schools, because I think we all know that the quality of an educational system, the quality of a school is only as good as the quality of the teachers. And so, the teacher education programs are critical to the future of our schools.

But you know, the comment that you were making earlier, I couldn't help but think—I spent 20 years in higher education—as long as we continue to research how people learn, how people learn best, and in what environments, there will always be new ideas and a quest to continuously improve how we do education so that the children get absolutely the best and the most out of that time in the classroom.

Senator DURBIN. The problem with education is, everybody's an expert.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Oh, that is true.

Senator DURBIN. And I would say that there's also—when you reach advanced age status, like myself, you reflect on what worked for you—spelling, phonics, diagramming sentences, and—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Which is why the scores in language and reading have improved in all of our OSP children, because it is the first and most important thing we focus on, because if you can't read, you can't do math, you can't do anything else.

Senator DURBIN. So, let me ask you—and this is kind of stepping back and taking a look—but, you know, when we talk about the voucher schools, D.C. Opportunity Scholarships, chances are 50 percent we're talking about Catholic schools.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. That's one-half the students.

So, I visited the Redeemer—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Holy Redeemer.

Senator DURBIN. Holy Redeemer. I ought to get that right. And—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And met some great kids.

Senator DURBIN. And also visited—is it the Shaw charter schools?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. And—which had formerly been Catholic elementary schools, and—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Center City—they were our Center City schools, yes, sir.

Senator DURBIN. Shaw was another school I visited.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. Center City I visited.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. And they converted over to become charter schools.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes, sir.

Senator DURBIN. Okay.

Now, can you give me an—well, I don't know if this is a matter of public record. You don't have to answer this. What does the Washington Archdiocese put into, what does it contribute to, its K through 12 education of students each year?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Well, in the District of Columbia—I think I actually have that number with me—just in providing supplement to what it actually costs—for the schools that are in the District of Columbia, the subsidy this year from the Archdiocese of Washington will be about \$1.6 million. That is on top of the Archdiocesan tuition assistance that we provide for our families in the District.

Senator DURBIN. Do you know how much that might—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. This year, the tuition assistance in the District of Columbia is probably about \$1 million or \$1.5 million, out of \$4 million across the Archdiocese.

Senator DURBIN. And so, I would say somewhere in a range of \$3 million, a little—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Is being put in by the D.C.—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. That is put in by the Catholic Church—

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Washington Archdiocese.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. And our donors, funders and the people who support and believe in the tradition we've established of serving others, and particularly those who really want to see our schools continue to—so, we are there to offer the choice to these families.

Senator DURBIN. And the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship brings about a little more than \$6 million—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Into the Archdiocesan schools, through this assistance.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. So, clearly the—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. It's clearly tuition revenue, as—it is what the parent is able to pay, because the parent has a scholarship, just like a scholarship from the Knights of Columbus.

Senator DURBIN. And so, the question being asked in Chicago and other places, and I'm sure being asked by some here, is, what's the future of Catholic education—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Oh, yes.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. In Washington?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. That's what we're talking about on Friday.

Senator DURBIN. Yes. And clearly some of your schools have now moved from being Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese to becoming charter schools.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes, sir.

Senator DURBIN. And I met with—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Mary Anne Stanton.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. Who had your job before, didn't she?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. No.

Senator DURBIN. What—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. She was the executive director of the Center City School.

Senator DURBIN. But, she had—but, she also—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. She was in charge of 1 school—or, the 12 schools, excuse me—

Senator DURBIN. Okay.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. At one time, 16.

Senator DURBIN. So, would you like to tell us—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Tell you what happened?

Senator DURBIN. No, you don't have to do that. But, if you could just tell us—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. I have a PowerPoint—no.

Senator DURBIN. Do you have a vision that there will be more Catholic elementary schools moving toward the Center City model charter school status?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. No, I don't. That is not my vision. I think it's very important that we have charter schools, public schools, nonpublic schools, and particularly parochial schools. I think it's important to the economy, to business, and to the politics of every city, that there are choices for the families when they come to those cities. Our families are different. Our children are different. The needs are different. And as you know, our parents believed in parental choice, and you made sacrifices, and I made sacrifices so that our children can go to Catholic schools. But, we do have families who can't afford to make any more sacrifices than they already make teaching two jobs, and so forth. Just like the young who you met at Holy Redeemer whose mother's in the military, and he can't afford it without the Opportunity Scholarship.

But, I think the future, really, is for us to work, as we are now, to provide as much opportunity for assistance to those who need it, and to do a better job of financing Catholic education, and to share with everybody the truth. I'll tell you, 5 years ago, when we were working on this legislation, Senator Durbin, the most frustrating thing for me was, everybody thought it only cost \$4,500 to educate a child in our Catholic schools, because that was the tuition. And we always have had our tuition less than the cost so that all families could come. We have to think—we're all working now, across the United States—Notre Dame, everyone—to come up with better ways of doing this.

Senator DURBIN. And when I asked Ms. Stanton about the difference between being a Catholic elementary school and now being

a D.C. charter school, she pointed out several things. Special education was one of them. She said, "We have more resources. We can deal with children who have special needs in a better way, in the D.C. charter system." But, she also pointed to one obvious thing—when you speak of sacrifice: Teachers are paid better in the charter school system and in the public school system than they're paid in many Catholic schools. So, there's a sacrifice being made. And—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. By Catholic schoolteachers.

Senator DURBIN. Very much so.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Absolutely.

Senator DURBIN. Right at the heart of the issue—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Always has been.

Senator DURBIN [continuing]. At the heart of the issue.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Always has been.

Senator DURBIN. And at some point, some of them reach the point where they can't do it anymore. I mean, that is one of the realities. And I won't second-guess what you're about, because I know you have an important mission and some hard decisions that have to be made, as we all do, on a regular basis.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Well, I thank you for giving us the opportunity to have the conversation with you today, because I think what we're looking at is the future of the lives of the children in the District of Columbia, and the opportunity for them to succeed in an environment, as you said, that is different from the charter schools. We are Catholic schools. And in the most recent survey, in November, of our families in the District of Columbia, the three reasons they choose our schools is, first, because they're safe and secure. That means the children have self-respect, discipline. You could feel it when you walked into Holy Redeemer.

Senator DURBIN. I could hear it.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And the second thing is that—

Senator DURBIN. What I—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL [continuing]. Academic excellence. But, third, these families want a Christian value-based education, so the whole child—not—I'm not talking about nutrition now—but, the whole child—their soul, their spirit, their love for life, and their willingness and wanting to give back to others—blooms and grows in these schools. We can't take that choice away from families.

Senator DURBIN. I understand what you're saying. I asked Ms. Stanton that question directly, what was the difference from being a Catholic schoolteacher to being a charter schoolteacher, when it came to religion?

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. And they cried.

Senator DURBIN. And she said, "We teach values here in these charter schools, too. You know, we think"—

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. Yes, but they're—

Senator DURBIN. It's different. I understand.

Dr. WEITZEL-O'NEILL. It's very, very different. And the teachers who have returned to our Catholic schools, and the families who have returned to our Catholic schools, will tell you it's very, very different.

Senator DURBIN. Ms. Levy, last question for you.

Ms. LEVY. Yes.

Senator DURBIN. So, what do you think of this proposal that's before the D.C. public schools now, in terms of the teachers being given an option of going on some probationary status for a year and then being rewarded or paid based on performance?

Ms. LEVY. I think we don't have the tools to measure performance at this point. It's been a great disappointment, in the past, that—you know, for many years, the union had a veto power over changing performances. In the mid 1990s, we got rid of that and said the school system has to decide how to evaluate teacher performance. And they put in a couple of new systems, which weren't really so new and didn't do a good job of evaluating, and that's where we are.

A few weeks ago, a new system was unveiled. I haven't even had a chance to look at it. But, that is the most critical tool we need. And until we have it, teachers cannot believe that they will be treated fairly. And that's a problem, and it's the kind of thing that drives good teachers away.

Senator DURBIN. As I understand, though, it's voluntary. The teachers can stay in the current system, with tenure and cost-of-living adjustments, or decide to opt in to this performance-based system. That's the way I understand it. Is that the way you understand it?

Ms. LEVY. That was the proposal, but it didn't apply to newly hired teachers. The other problem with it, of course, is that I do not see any way that the cost could be sustained. It was to be done with private money, and right now the school system, for the next fiscal year that begins in a couple of days, is putting \$50 million in stimulus money to replace local funds. I don't know how they're going to sustain that when the stimulus funds run out. And that's without a teacher pay increase at all. So, I think we have to look at financial reality, as well as the evaluation system.

Senator DURBIN. In my position, I'm not critical of other government leaders who have budget problems.

We all face challenges.

I want to thank all those who are here today for coming back and participating in this. This is not the last of these hearings. I think we have been remiss, on Capitol Hill, of not coming together more frequently to ask questions, to make sure that we improve the laws that we have, to enforce the laws that we have, and to hold one another to high standards.

I thank you all for being here.

The record will be open for a week, and we may send some questions your way, which I hope you can respond to in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

CONCLUSION OF HEARINGS

Senator DURBIN. This meeting stands recessed.
[Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., Tuesday, September 29, the hearings were concluded, and the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]