

OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY:
THE PROMISE OF EXPANDED SCHOOL CHOICE
AND ALTERNATIVES TO
FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY
POLICY, AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

Serial No. 119-48

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform



Available on: govinfo.gov, oversight.house.gov or docs.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

61-737 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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Written opening statements and bios are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.

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- * Article, *City Journal*, “Blue States Used to Lead in Education, Not Any-more”; submitted by Rep. Burlison.
- * Article, *Journal of School Choice*, “Is More School Choice Associated with Higher State-Level Performance on the NAEP”; submitted by Rep. Burlison.
- * Statement, September 17, 2025, Defending Education; submitted by Rep. Burlison.
- * Bill Text, H.R. 3345—119th Congress; submitted by Rep. Higgins.
- * Letter, from Americans United for Separation of Church and State, to Subcommittee on September 16, 2025; submitted by Rep. Min.
- * Letter, from National Parents Union to Subcommittee; submitted by Rep. Min.
- * Statement from Christy Moreno of National Parents Union, September 17, 2025; submitted by Rep. Min.
- * Statement from The Arc, September 17, 2025; submitted by Rep. Min.

The documents listed above are available at: docs.house.gov.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

- * Questions for the Record: Ms. Rachel Greszler; submitted by Rep. Burlison.
- * Questions for the Record: Mr. Shaka Mitchell; submitted by Rep. Burlison.

These documents were submitted after the hearing, and may be available upon request.

**OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY:
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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY POLICY, AND
REGULATORY AFFAIRS

Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eric Burlison [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Burlison, Higgins, Boebert, Frost, Ansari, and Min.

Mr. BURLISON. This hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs will come to order.

I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

I recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN ERIC BURLISON
REPRESENTATIVE FROM MISSOURI**

Mr. BURLISON. Plato once said, "the direction in which education starts, a man will determine his future in life." This truth echoes across the millennia for our youth today. Education is a foundation of a flourishing society and individual, and yet in America today our education foundation has seen cracks and has been crumbling for years. That jeopardizes American prosperity.

For 25 years, reading and math proficiency has flatlined, our children are not flourishing. They are falling behind. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic behemoth of traditional, and I stress traditional, K through 12 education has only grown larger measuring its success only by the outcomes of one metric: college admissions.

For many decades, college has been thought of as the key to success in American. College degrees guaranteed high-paying comfortable jobs, but the promise of college as a guaranteed path to prosperity is now waning. Half of the graduate class of 2023 now works in jobs that do not even require a degree.

Entry-level white-collar positions are disappearing as our economy changes and the use of artificial intelligence rises. The United States faces an unprecedented surplus of college graduates, many buried in debt for decades, many holding degrees of little value to the marketplace.

At the same time, our economy is starved for what higher education refuses to supply, which is manufacturing technicians, skilled tradesmen, engineers, and tradeswomen, and workers who can build to maintain the backbone of this great nation. It is time that we re-evaluate our education system.

Fortunately, President Trump and Congressional Republicans have made considerable efforts to challenge the traditional model. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act that was signed into law earlier this year incentivizes funding of scholarships and offers an opportunity for parents to send their children to the best schools.

School choice is not a theory. It is freedom and it is competition and it is accountability. It is vital to our economy, and it should be as American as apple pie and baseball. And alternative choices are not just needed at the K through 12 level. They are also needed at the postsecondary level. Recent reporting from the Department of Labor highlights that in the trades the average salary after completion of an apprenticeship is \$11,000 more than that of recent college graduates.

Career in trades, as we will hear today from our witnesses, are vital. They offer high-paying jobs and provide ample opportunities across our education and training programs, and they are vital to prepare young people to take advantage of these opportunities. They pass on critical learning that upholds and strengthens businesses and local economies. America needs more postsecondary educational alternatives to prepare young people for these rewarding careers, alternatives that offer clear cut and viable opportunities compared to underperforming 4-year college programs.

America's youth and families deserve and America's economy demands educational and career training choices that better fit students, families, and the needs of our communities. And with that, I yield to Ranking Member Frost for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER

MAXWELL FROST, REPRESENTATIVE FROM FLORIDA

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Chairman Burlison, and thank you so much to the witnesses for being here this morning. In America, every student's school should set them up for success in life and a plan after graduation whether it is 4-year college, trade school, apprenticeship, or going straight into the workforce so that a student can survive in the 21st century in our country.

But in the richest country in the world, every child should be able to unleash their potential and flourish. It is a promise that we are failing to keep: 2025 test scores in high school reading and math shows the lowest results in decades.

Too many schools are not paying their teachers enough or do not have strong extracurricular programs. More than half of the school districts need major upgrades or renovations to their buildings, and too many students are graduating high school without a concrete

plan for what comes next, and for many it is a problem of opportunity.

Communities of color, rural communities, working class families have systemically been excluded from quality education and a better future.

House Democrats have been fighting to fix this. We worked with President Biden to help schools recover from the pandemic. We pushed for robust child nutritional programs because kids cannot learn when they are hungry. We worked to ensure that schools have clean drinking water free from lead contamination, and we have consistently stood with children when fighting to enact gun violence prevention measures, actions that Americans overwhelmingly support.

Democrats will continue to fight so that every student, regardless of where they live or their family's income, has unlimited potential.

But we have got to be clear about what we are up against. Congressional Republicans are pushing policies that would make this vision harder to reach and not easier. Their so-called solution of using government taxpayer money to subsidize private schools drains resources from the vast majority of students, 90 percent of whom attend public school.

The proposed nationwide voucher program would starve public schools of up to \$5 billion annually taking money from public schools that have an obligation to educate every student and instead give it to private schools that can in many cases only take a select few.

Republicans call this school choice, but it is not a choice for families, because it is the charter school or private school that ultimately gets to decide which students they take and which students they keep.

Our public schools are tasked with educating all students, no matter who they are. And private schools are not held to the same standards as public schools.

Private schools that take public dollars through voucher programs do not even have basic protections for students with disabilities. While Republicans claim—while congressional Republicans claim that you can access a better education with vouchers, evidence shows that no improvement or even worst test scores and achievement outcomes for children who attend private schools using vouchers, essentially taking taxpayer government money and funneling it to corporations, a lot of same story we saw in the Big Beautiful Bill for billionaires.

We know this is true in Florida. Private school vouchers are expected to cost the state \$3.9 billion for the most recent school year. Meanwhile, student achievement in Florida continues to decline. When a child's education is nurtured, they can flourish whatever career they choose, and I think about my own story as someone who attended and benefited from Florida public schools.

I attended a public arts high school and middle school, the Osceola County School for the Arts, very underfunded public arts school. We had instruments falling apart, but we made do with what we had. And as a kid, I often got in trouble. I was a bit of a troublemaker, believe it or not. But it was my teachers who in-

vested in me and sent me on a path that I followed all the way to the U.S. Congress.

In Florida public schools, I learned how to advocate. I even sat on my local school board in the Osceola County School District representing all the students of Osceola County for two years, my junior and senior year of high school, and sitting on that school board I got to see what it meant to stand up for what you believe in during public comment, see the lines and rows of teachers and students and families lining up to say something to the school board. They even let me sit on the dais.

I bring this up—oh, and I also learned how to explore different paths. I was a drummer. Obviously, something went wrong, because I went from drumming into politics, but I was a jazz drummer.

Without a strong public school and without an education system that valued the arts, I would not be where I am today. And as someone who did not graduate college, yes, I am one of the few Members of Congress without a 4-year degree, I went straight into working. But I understand the need to invest in all students futures, even those who do not have a 4-year degree.

Democrats worked with the Biden Harris Administration to invest in thousands of new apprenticeship opportunities through the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, and for students who chose to go to college, the previous Administration removed some of the crippling student debt that was holding them back from financial success.

House Democrats will continue to work to improve college affordability to ensure that every student that wants an education can get an education and a quality college degree.

Meanwhile, we see the Trump Administration, they are gutting the Department of Education, ending Federal student loan programs, and creating a backlog of civil rights enforcement cases. Trump has also undermined workplace protections by crippling the National Labor Relations Board, gutting the work of the Equal Opportunities Employment Commission, and destroying the unions that fight for safe and fair working conditions for more than one million Federal employees. Now, for the first time since 2021, in the direct aftermath after COVID pandemic, there are more people looking for jobs than there are jobs available in this country.

This is where the Trump policies have led us. The government has a critical role in changing course and setting every child up for success. This means fully funding our public schools, expanding access to apprenticeship and job training opportunities, and addressing the college affordability crisis that prices too many families from opportunities. I look forward to our witness testimony on how Congress can restore the American dream, and I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Ranking Member Frost.

I am pleased to welcome a panel of witnesses who each bring their experience and expertise that we will find valuable for today's discussion. First, we have Shaka Mitchell, who is a Senior Fellow at the American Federation for Children. Next, we have Dr. Cody Hirschi, Superintendent of Reed Springs School District, which is in my district in Stone County, Missouri. Dr. Hirschi has worked in education for over 15 years, and not only is he Superintendent,

but he helps to oversee the Reed Springs High School Table Rock Career Center.

Next, we have Todd Dillender who is the Chief Operating Officer of Caliber Collision Centers. And next I would like to welcome Rachel Greszler who is a Visiting Fellow at the Economic Policy Innovation Center and Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation. And finally, we have Stephanie Vanos who is a School Board Member for District Six in Orange County, Florida. I want to say thank you to each of you for being here today and we all look forward to your testimony.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise their right hands.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.

Let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative. You may take your seats.

We appreciate all of you being here and look forward to your testimony. Let me remind you how this works. You have provided written statements. Each of you gets 5 minutes. In front of you there is a light, and when it turns yellow, it is time to start wrapping up. When it turns red, it is time to complete your thoughts.

And with that, I now recognize Mr. Mitchell for his 5 minute opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SHAKA MITCHELL, SENIOR FELLOW
AMERICAN FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN**

Mr. MITCHELL. Thank you, Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Shaka Mitchell, and I serve as a Senior Fellow at the American Federation For Children, the Nation's largest school choice advocacy organization. Our mission is simple. To ensure that families, especially lower income families, have the freedom to choose the education that best fits the needs of their child.

Education is a foundation of opportunity in America, but today too many children are being denied the opportunity. The most recent national assessment of educational progress scores show historic lows in reading, math, and science among high school students. These declines began long before the pandemic, but COVID-19 accelerated the crisis.

The result is millions of young people graduating without the skills they need for college, the workforce, or civic life. This is not just an education problem. It is a workforce problem, a civic problem, and ultimately an economic problem.

School choice provides a path forward. Today over 1.3 million students are enrolled in one of 74 publicly funded choice programs across the country. This is not about abandoning public education. It is about expanding options, fostering innovation, and holding every school accountable for results.

And evidence is clear, school choice improves outcomes for students who participate and for those who remain in traditional public schools. In fact, 27 out of 30 studies have shown positive or neutral effects on the achievement of students who stay in their local public schools.

Perhaps the most striking data comes from Ohio's Ed Choice Program. Students in that program were not just more likely to graduate high school. They were 30 percent more likely to enroll in college and 60 percent more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than their peers. For the lowest income students, the effect was even greater. They were 175 percent more likely to graduate from college. These are not incremental gains. These are life-changing outcomes.

And behind every statistic is a student. I think of Izzy, a young woman I met in St. Louis. Izzy was born with spina bifida, and her public school could not or would not provide accommodations because they said they could not do it for a single child.

With financial assistance, her mom, a former public-school teacher, enrolled her in a private school. Today Izzy is thriving academically and socially, and alongside her mom Becky, she advocates for other students who need options. That is the power of giving families education freedom.

Critics often say we should simply spend more on traditional systems, but Florida offers a powerful counter example. Between 2003 and 2017, Florida invested about \$2.5 billion in its tax credit scholarship program. That investment generated achievement gains for public school students 11 times greater than what equivalent spending increases would have produced in the public system.

In other words, choice does not just work. It provides a higher return on investment than other educational interventions.

Education is also about cultivating citizens. Research shows that students in choice programs are more likely to volunteer, vote, and engage civically, and school choice fosters community renewal. I have seen it firsthand in Nashville where high performing charter schools do not just educate children, they attract investment, create jobs, and stabilize neighborhoods.

Members of the Subcommittee, this ought not be a debate about dollars. It is about human potential. It is about being college career and military ready. And so, the question before us is whether we will give every family, regardless of income or zip code, the freedom to choose the education that helps their child flourish. Thanks to this Congress, school choice will be coming to every state soon.

On behalf of the American Federation for Children, I thank you for your leadership and urge Congress to support families by supporting policies that expand educational freedom. Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize Dr. Hirschi for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF DR. CODY HIRSCHI, SUPERINTENDENT REEDS SPRING SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. HIRSCHI. Good morning, Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, and Members of the Committee. My name is Cody Hirschi. I am the Superintendent of the Reed Springs School District in southwest Missouri. We are a rural school similar to many found across our great state and throughout our country, and our students come to school having experienced trauma, food insecurity, and a lack of stable adult guidance. We educate them all while helping each child envision and pursue the full potential control of who they can become.

I believe this is the greatest time to be an educator in that we are raising the greatest generation of children our country has seen. I am here because we are working to build a stronger and more resilient America. Each child deserves a personalized learning experience that prepares them for the workforce, family life, and active responsible citizenship.

At Reed Springs Schools we are partnering with parents and the community to move beyond the 19th century model of education to create a system that builds durable skills and real-world experiences. This shared vision drives our expansion of career pathways, internships, and other real-world opportunities. We chose to invest in real-world learning because we see every day how students thrive when their education connects directly to authentic career paths. We have implemented several key initiatives to provide our students with choice and options.

First, we created a regional internship program called RSWorks. This internship experience serves three counties and 11 school districts. We strategically invested in a full-time internship coordinator who develops partnerships with our area chamber of commerce and business community to create placement opportunities for our high school students. Our students spend a portion of their school day working in mostly paid internships with experts in their field of interest.

These business partners collaborate with our internship coordinator to create meaningful exposure to their industry. Most of our interns secure full-time employment in their internship field after high school or continue postsecondary studies in related area.

Here are two examples of how our internship program is impacting our students. Max, as a junior, was ready to extend his learning beyond the regular curriculum. Our team worked with Max to create a schedule that allowed him to take 33 college credit hours his junior year.

Max entered his senior year thinking he wanted to go into dentistry. Through our RSWorks program, Max obtained a paid internship with a local dentist where he received on-the-job training and could now determine if this is a path he wants to pursue.

Another student, Emma, was deciding between a career in law and working with animals. During her law internship, she quickly realized that being an attorney was not the route for her. She fell in love with working with animals and is now going into—is now in a pre-veterinary program at Missouri State University. In Emma's case, she was able to quickly learn that going into law was not for her well before she wasted money and time in college.

Another area where we are innovating and providing real world experiences is our new Table Rock Career Center partly funded by Federal Perkins dollars. Our career center gives students across the region real world hands-on training in fields such as Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), health occupations, automotive and collision repair, culinary arts, welding and construction, graphic design and technology, education, marine technology, engineering, and criminal justice.

Before launching these programs, we surveyed students, analyzed regional labor market data, and collaborated with local employers to design pathways that align with both student goals and

workforce needs. Students build homes, repair cars, and serve in nursing homes and on ambulances among several other real world learning opportunities. Each program is guided by an advisory team of experts working in our community in those related fields.

Not only do our students gain incredible experience, but they are also earning industry recognized credentials growing from 28 earned when I arrived to 226 earned last year. Eighty-eight percent of our students who attend Table Rock Career Center and are in an internship have a positive placement in a career path in the related field or postsecondary institution offered to them.

Through our portrait of graduate framework, we emphasize durable skills such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, integrity, perseverance, and emotional resilience. We are implementing student pathways, strength-based assessments, and competency-based learning giving students voice and agency in their education. Families who might otherwise look outside the public system for individualized programs can find those very opportunities right in their neighborhood public school.

We are working tremendously hard in southwest Missouri to provide the diversity and quality of options that parents and students seek with the hope that they leave our campus really prepared for life. By building a world-class, student-centered system that offers meaningful pathways and personalized learning, we ensure that are schools embody the very best education has to offer. Thank you for the opportunity to share our story and for your commitment to America's children.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Dr. Hirschi.

I now recognize Mr. Dillender for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF TODD DILLENDER
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, CALIBER COLLISION CENTERS**

Mr. DILLENDER. Thank you. Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

For me, this is not just business. It is personal. I started in the collision repair more than 30 years ago as a technician apprenticeship. I have been a detailer, a Service Advisor, a General Manager, and today I serve as Chief Operating Officer at Caliber Collision.

I have lived what this career can offer and I know firsthand how life changing it is when someone gets a chance to learn a trade. That is why the shortage of technicians weighs heavily on me. Tech force estimates we need nearly 100,000 new technicians between 2024 and 2028. And the reality is our traditional pipelines, high school and trade school graduates, simply are not producing enough people to keep up.

This shortage ripples across the economy. When repairs are delayed, costs rise, insurers feel it, consumers feel it, and road safety is at risk, and the challenge is only growing. Vehicles are more complex than ever with advanced safety systems that must be calibrated and tested before they go back on the road. That makes every repair more critical and every technician more essential.

This is why we built TAP, our Technician Apprentices Program. TAP takes people, many with no prior experience, and provides structured training, mentorship, and a clear path to certification.

It is competency based, typically completed within 12 to 18 months. Apprentices are paid day one. They receive benefits and they are given tools early in the program, and they graduate debt free. It is life changing. They walk away with a career and a future they may have never imagined.

And the impact is real. Since 2023, we have graduated more than 2,300 apprentices and at any given time we have another 1,300 to 1,800 in training. Those graduates are out in the field today repairing tens of thousands of vehicles, keeping families safe, and restoring the rhythm of their lives.

We celebrate every milestone. Graduations are big moments. Families are invited, mentors are recognized, and apprentices are honored for their achievement. For many families, this is the very first graduation that they have ever attended. I have stood in the rooms. I have seen the pride, the tears, and the joy, and it proves what programs like this can do, not just for an apprentice, but for an entire family.

And mentorship is the heartbeat of TAP. Our most seasoned technicians, true craftsmen with decades of experience, serve as mentors. For them it is more than training. As the physical demands in trade increase with age, mentoring gives them a way to extend their careers, pass down their knowledge, and shape the future of the profession.

We have proven this model works, but here is the truth. One company or even one industry, we cannot solve this alone. The need spans every skilled trade, automotive, diesel, aviation, and beyond. If more employers had the resources to launch and sustain programs like TAP, we could transform the workforce across this country.

Too often grants and incentives help with startup costs, but sustaining programs like this is expensive. Companies like ours are making long-term investments, but to scale nationally, we need help. And this is where you come in.

By expanding workforce funding, offering tax incentives, and reducing regulatory barriers, you can help more companies create, sustain, and scale apprenticeship programs. We have shown what is possible. Now we need to multiply it. And with your support, apprenticeships can become the engine that rebuilds America's skilled workforce across collision, across trade, and across industries.

Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing me to share our experience. For me, this started as an apprentice turning wrenches, and today it is about ensuring the next generation has the same chance. I am grateful for your leadership in helping make that possible.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Mr. Dillender.

I now recognize Ms. Greszler for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF RACHEL GRESZLER, VISITING FELLOW
IN WORKFORCE, ECONOMIC POLICY INNOVATION CENTER
SENIOR POLICY ANALYST, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION**

Ms. GRESZLER. Mr. Burlison, Mr. Frost, and other Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. In my testimony I will provide a snapshot of younger Americans' em-

ployment, identify government policies that are holding younger people back, highlight some positive momentum and further solutions, and last, note the high stakes for younger Americans.

Twenty-five years ago, the majority of younger Americans were working. Today, fewer than half of younger Americans are employed. That is a gap of 4.5 million young people who are not working. This matters because whether working in fast food or retail or an entry-level office job, those first jobs teach important life skills like showing up on time, getting along with co-workers, and sticking with a task, even when it is boring or difficult.

Unfortunately, many schools are not doing their part to prepare young people to be reliable workers and responsible adults. Test scores have stagnated, grade inflation is rampant, and discipline and accountability are lacking. The result, as scholar Samuel Abrams put it, is the quiet unraveling of a trait, conscientiousness, that built civilization. Younger Americans are more careless and distracted. They are less tenacious and resilient. They make fewer commitments and fail to follow through on their commitments they do make.

Families play the most important role, but they are having to push back against school, culture, and government policies. Washington has poured hundreds of billions of dollars into Federal higher education subsidies. They have created a near monopoly on student lending, but instead of better outcomes for students, they face higher tuition, ballooning debt, and too many degrees that do not pay off. More than a third of undergraduate programs today have a negative return on investment, and only 60 percent of students who enter a college graduate with a degree within six years.

Meanwhile, red tape is holding back proven alternatives like apprenticeships. A Harvard study found that we could be using apprenticeships to fill three times as many occupations and eight times as many job openings. The good news is that states, communities, and employers are showing what works. Florida and Arizona have led the way in demonstrating school choice success. And now as more states are following suit, we are seeing increasing numbers.

Half of U.S. students are eligible for some form of private choice program. Also, over just the past two years, a majority of states have passed laws limiting cell phone use in schools. When students are not glued to screens, they learn better, they feel safer, and they can become more conscientious.

In Alabama, the west Alabama partnership brings schools and employers together. Ninth graders are required to attend a Worlds of Work Career Expo and seniors can attend these expos and leave with a guaranteed job after graduation.

Employers and industries are taking action too. In 2010, Toyota started the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education Apprenticeship Program. Now Fame U.S.A. as it is known has become an industry-run program in which students participate in both paid on-the-job training and classroom education. They earn an associate's degree in advanced manufacturing and 90 percent of participants find employment with their sponsoring employers. Moreover, they earn up to 86 percent more than their peers. We need more of these bridges from education to work.

Congress has already taken significant steps in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act expanding 529 accounts, creating workforce Pell Grants, limiting Federal subsidies for low value degrees, and imposing work requirements in SNAP and Medicaid. But more can be done. Policymakers should expand apprenticeships, phase down Federal subsidies that fuel higher tuition, replace failed Federal job training programs with employer-led initiatives, and make welfare more work oriented.

And lastly, I want to give a strong word of caution. The stakes are high. America is quickly aging. By 2034, there will be more seniors than children for the first time in history. At the same time, the Federal debt is rapidly rising with no clear plan to confront it. Our debt is the equivalent of a second mortgage for today's younger Americans.

Today's young people will be called on to produce more, to support an aging population, and they will be required to pay more to cover past and current spending largesse. America cannot afford to let millions of young people drift without the skills, discipline, and opportunity that they need to obtain good jobs, rising incomes, and the dignity of work. Our nation's long-term strength and stability depend upon it. Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Ms. Greszler.

I now recognize Ms. Vanos for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE VANOS (MINORITY WITNESS)
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, DISTRICT 6
ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (FLORIDA)**

Ms. VANOS. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Burlison, Ranking Member Frost, Subcommittee Members. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Stephanie Vanos. I am a mom of three children in Orange County Public Schools in Florida. I am also a school board member for District Six, and my testimony today reflects my experiences from what I see and know within Orange County Public Schools.

I want to begin with a story about a recent OCPS graduate. Adam has been an OCPS student since he was in kindergarten. Recognizing the impact of funding deficits and the need to provide additional academic support for students, he started his own non-profit while he was in high school which provided free afterschool tutoring to middle school students. The program was such a success, and he has the data to prove it, that he expanded the program not only at his school but other OCPS high schools.

During his senior year, Adam also created an immersive experience for students to learn about the Holocaust and fund-raised over \$40,000 to bring a replica of a Holocaust train car to his high school. With the encouragement of his school principal, 1,500 students and over 500 community members went through the exhibit.

In his spare time, this OCPS graduate also created a free mobile app, which has an international platform, is exclusive sponsor of the UF Club Pickleball team for the 2025/2026 season, and is partnered with other major universities. After a year of Adam will attend the University of Florida next year.

Adam is an impressive student, but OCPS students and graduates are doing incredible things every day. Just this past week-

end, a group of middle school students in my district competed in a girls with energy hackathon sponsored by Siemens Energy and won first place with their project titled “The Hive” in which they devised a solution to bring energy to sandstorm shelters in desert environments.

Students in the guitar class at another middle school in my district have secured 22 of the 23 Orange County audition slots for All-State Guitar this weekend. Meanwhile, finance students at my neighborhood high school are becoming certified to give free tax return assistance to community members.

In the classroom, our OCPS students are pursuing advanced classes at higher rates, gaining critical thinking skills, and saving money on college credits. Just last year OCPS introduced a new AP precalculus course which over 2,500 students took and 72 percent passed the AP exam.

When it comes to choices and options, our public schools are excelling. Our students are building a strong academic foundation and have access to options whether they pursue a 4-year degree, a 2-year degree, or a trade. For no cost, high school students can pursue dual enrollment and can earn credentials in construction, transportation, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, or welding while also earning credits toward a high school diploma.

Unlike the private school counterparts, all students have access to a high-quality education at OCPS, not just students who pass an entrance exam or are specially selected. This includes students with disabilities, students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and English language learners. They all graduate OCPS with options. Our public schools do the most work for the most people despite chronic underfunding by the State of Florida.

Voucher and charter school proponents often highlight the importance of school choice as if it is a new concept, but choice is nothing new in the public school arena. Choices abound in our public schools in the form of elective courses, magnet programs, advanced studies, dual enrollment, career and technical education, and certificate programs as well as extensive extracurricular clubs and sports programs. In fact, charter, home school, and private school students often choose to take advantage of the extensive array of public school options and choices.

Public school families love public school choices, but these choices cannot be sustained with current funding constraints, much less grow to meet the evolving needs of our students. Our communities understand this, which is why parents and stakeholders are so frustrated and concerned when they see public tax dollars in Florida, to the tune of \$3.9 billion, being diverted away from our public schools into a shadow system of unregulated, unaccountable, and untransparent private schools.

How is this fiscally responsible? How is this in the best interest of our children, students, and communities? All students deserve highly qualified, well-paid teachers in their classroom. My high school daughters have lost three of their AP teachers to higher paying careers since last spring. I regularly see one of the teachers in my district working a second shift at target to make ends meet.

Teachers can no longer afford to provide after-school tutoring to students because their schools cannot pay them enough to make it financially worth their off-duty time. Academic counselors are so overworked that students are not getting the personal attention they need.

At a performing arts magnet school, students and parents are fundraising for the performing arts, for theater productions, instruments, and dance recitals. We are not even funding the choices that we have. Even school safety is implicated in this disinvestment as OCPs seriously considers resorting to lesser trained guardians in place of our highly trained and connected school resource officers.

Our transportation needs are woefully underfunded by our state, and as the funding does not keep up, our class sizes increase.

90 percent of American families choose public schools. Let us fund their choice. Let us invest in schools that are transparent and accountable to the public. Let us invest in options that can serve all of our children and will prepare them for whatever their future holds. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Ms. Vanos.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions. Ms. Greszler, the research that was quoted earlier suggests that one out of every two college graduates in the United States is employed in a job that does not require a degree. Is it fair to say that the postsecondary education system is not meeting students' needs?

Ms. GRESZLER. I think in many instances it is not, and that is due to this massive amount of subsidies that are pushing too many people into college 4-year degrees and also graduate degrees, but also a lack of awareness about what is the outcome of those degrees, and that is why I think it has been a good thing that Congress has instituted those restrictions so that funding are not going to go to programs that do not produce an outcome of earnings that are higher than a high school graduate.

And that is exactly what we need more of is more of these market-based solutions, but we are lacking that with the enormous amount of Federal money that is in higher education.

Mr. BURLISON. When I hear the testimony of Dr. Hirschi about what is happening in Reed Springs, it seems promising that they are figuring out how to meet the needs of the community. Is that rare? Is that happening across the country, or is this rare?

Ms. GRESZLER. It is fortunate that we are seeing more of it happening, but this is a recent uptake, and I think that hopefully we will continue to see more and more of that, but that is really where students are getting the education while being paid that is leading to the same or higher level earnings as they would get from a college degree, and yet they are coming out without mountains of debt, and so hopefully we will continue to see more of that.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Mr. Dillender, when it comes to your industry, I really was intrigued by learning about your TAP program, the Technician Apprenticeship Program. So, my question is, without a program like that, many young people feel compelled to take out loans and pursue a 4-year degree during a crucially formative time in their life.

Could you speak to the transformative effect that the TAP program has on helping people achieve their milestones for apprenticeships.

Mr. DILLENDER. So, I think what I have witnessed and what I have seen at many of the graduations, if you are thinking specifically about the apprentice and kind of the opportunities as they graduate that that kind of promotes and number of stories of obviously first homes, first cars, those things being purchased and, you know, really having an opportunity to support their families very, very differently, so that is one of the key things that we see as a result of this is as you look at the families and you spend time with them and understand the impact, you know, that you have made with them.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Dr. Hirschi, how has the Table Rock Career Center's newer programs helped students to flourish?

Dr. HIRSCHI. It has been significant. Getting our kids to begin at a young age to understand their workforce, what those options are, we are really shifting the narrative in southwest Missouri around entering the workforce rather than just focusing on a college career path, and so we are seeing kids that are having a really strong experiences at a young age where they are not—

Mr. BURLISON. Are you seeing that they are excited to come to school or go into the—

Dr. HIRSCHI. You can take a kid that maybe is in a classroom prior to having this workforce connection and they are just not seeing relevance to the work that they are doing.

And then as soon as they get into an internship or they are at our career center in one of these trades, the light just ignites, and so we see a drastic shift in engagement.

That is why these kids, once they leave our career center, they are going off and entering into a field because they found a passion.

Mr. BURLISON. Would you say—so you kind of integrate with the business needs of the community. Would it be fair to say that you both enhance the outcomes for the students but also are providing value to the local community?

Dr. HIRSCHI. Absolutely. Our local chamber of commerce is a significant partner for us, and so we are creating a workforce path for our own local community. Many of our students are going off to pursue other career paths, but then coming back into our local economy, so it is really starting to gain a lot of momentum, the work that we are doing.

Mr. BURLISON. What kind of feedback do you generally get from the employers?

Dr. HIRSCHI. It is absolutely amazing. We are actually adding more and more employers, because the word of mouth spreads within our community, and so we actually have so many employers that are wanting interns that we are trying to just find placement for them, and so they are kind of biting at the bit just waiting to get a student placed in their employment.

Mr. BURLISON. Wow.

Dr. HIRSCHI. In their business.

Mr. BURLISON. That is fantastic. Thank you, and I yield back the remainder of my time. I now recognize Ms. Ansari for her 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

School choice is a convenient euphemism. We know from history and from reality that what it really means is siphoning taxpayer dollars away from public schools and handing them over to private institutions that do not have the same accountability or transparency. We do not have to look very far to see the consequences.

Ms. Greszler, I know you represent the Heritage Foundation, of course the architect of Project 2025, openly antipublic education, and you referenced Arizona as a success story when it comes to voucher programs. I actually represent Phoenix, Arizona.

I can tell you firsthand that our voucher program has been a catastrophic failure in our state. We have seen ballooning costs, rampant misuse, and absolutely zero evidence that student outcomes have improved. Our so-called empowerment scholarship accounts were sold as a lifeline to our low-income families in the state.

In reality, the majority of funds, about 70 percent, are being used by families coming from the wealthiest zip codes in Arizona. These are families already sending their kids to private schools while public schools in Arizona are left with fewer resources to serve the vast majority of students.

The oversight also has been a disaster. We had a hearing on this with Secretary McMahon and she was unaware of the rampant misuse. We have seen in Arizona families use voucher dollars on luxury items, pianos, ski trips, and even video game consoles. This disaster of a policy has also led to over a billion dollars of a budget deficit in our Arizona State budget.

It is an issue every single year that the legislature has to deal with, and that budget shortfall has meant that we have had to make really, really harmful cuts to a wide range of other critical programs. I am sure everyone knows that Arizona has a major water security issue. Last year we had to cut \$333 million from our water infrastructure projects to account for this rampant misuse and abuse of the voucher program.

Meanwhile, our public school teachers are paying out of their own pockets for classroom supplies, which is shameful. Students with disabilities, English language learners, and low-income students who are getting left behind. Private schools can pick and choose who they admit. Public schools serve everyone. And voucher programs only widen inequities as opposed to solving them.

Ms. Greszler, you stated in your opening that the number of students benefiting from private K12 choice more than doubled between 2020 and 2025. Yes or no, just because more students are using school choice vouchers, does that mean that the program is a success?

Ms. GRESZLER. By nature of it being a choice, that is because unlike a public school where you do not have another option if there is not a choice there, if the people who are choosing school vouchers are not happy with them, they can always go back to the public schools.

Ms. ANSARI. So, the numbers have gone up, but the answer is most certainly no, because prolific data shows that test scores and

achievement standards are either the same or lower with school choice vouchers than non-voucher schools. In fact, established research shows that investing in public schools is a better investment providing a higher overall return than voucher programs.

It just makes sense. We have to invest and strengthen our public schools, the schools that educate, as our other witness mentioned, nine out of ten children in this country, not undermine them with unaccountable voucher programs.

Unfortunately, in so many other ways, the Trump Administration is leaving students and kids and families behind. Trump's Big Ugly Bill instituted sweeping cuts to SNAP, which will make it more difficult for kids to get school lunches, and if the health and well-being of America's new generation are not important enough, the provision creating a Federal tax credit scholarship program has shown to redistribute funding from the Nation's poorest families and rural communities to the wealthiest families in this country.

Ms. Greszler, yes or no, when kids are hungry, do they perform better or worse in school?

Ms. GRESZLER. Worse.

Ms. ANSARI. And yes or no, when kids do not get the healthcare they need when they are sick, as Trump's cuts to Medicaid will make sure happens to millions of families in this country, do they perform better or worse in school?

Ms. GRESZLER. There were no cuts to Medicaid for children in the One Big Beautiful Bill. There were actually limits to able-bodied dependents without children.

Ms. ANSARI. 17 million Americans will be impacted. We also know that rural hospitals will close as a result. The medical community across the board has sounded the alarm on how this will impact children in this country as a result.

I think it is important to look at the holistic picture. Clearly, Republicans have invited witnesses to this hearing that are unprepared to engage seriously or unaware of all of the other consequences and all of the other dynamics at play with the budgets that Congress and Trump are signing into law.

I really hope that we can refocus on solutions for working people, for students, for families rather than attacking our public education system as the Trump Administration seems intent on doing.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Ms. Ansari.

I now recognize Mr. Higgins for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The line of questioning here for our panelists, we appreciate them all being here, conservative and liberal alike. The line of questioning from my Democrat colleague essentially attacking a Republican position and President Trump's Administration's willingness to embrace this generational issue or the failure of our education system, that is out of line.

It is very clear for every American that has rubbed two brain cells together over the course of the last 50 years, Mr. Chairman, that the funding that we have dumped into education at the Federal level has not resulted in excellent results for our kids, and the expense is tremendous. When I started college in 1979, tuition for a year at LSU was \$1,500. Tuition for a year now at LSU is

\$12,000. So, there was—and books were 100, \$200 a semester. We bought used books.

As far as living expenses, you know, shelter and food, the cost of life, you had that expense if you were in college or not. It is not intellectually sound to say that is a cost of education. You have to pay your rent. You have to buy your groceries whether you go to college or not. So, we manage.

Very few students back then had student loans, and the value of that education was tremendous. It was almost guaranteed you were going to get a better job, better paying job if you—if it was your decision to go through college, but the difference was the expense of college was so low, the value so high, and the culture of our country produced young American citizens that made choices with their families to go into a 4-year education degree or not because we had been well-prepared to decide not to go to college.

Beginning in the seventh grade, across the country, public schools, young Americans were trained with a trade. In Louisiana, we learned agriculture, carpentry, auto repair, mechanics, welding, equipment operation, timber and logging, and interestingly, parliamentary procedure. We were expected as young Americans to learn a trade and have found a sweet-spot as a young American.

By the time you graduated high school, you better be able to go to work and you better understand parliamentary procedure. You have to understand your Constitution, your founding documents, because you were expected to participate in society.

This was our country. This was the way our education system plugged into our communities and our citizenry for generations until we got so wise at the Federal level and so unionized throughout our education system that we decided that is it, you have to have a 4-year degree and it is going to cost more and more and more.

Now we are crippling young Americans with debt for degrees that they do not use, and in many cases when they do get their degree, they come out of school, they have to interview for a job with somebody that never went to college, because that is going to be their supervisor. So, we have to address this. We have to train our young people.

Mr. Mitchell, if we shifted back to the way we did things before, what would happen for our young Americans in our country?

Mr. MITCHELL. Thank you, Congressman, for the question and for, you know, the information about what our education system used to set our children up for, and I think you are right to acknowledge that we have become too fixated on 4-year college degrees today. One of the things that I believe school choice actually helps with is showing families that there is a menu of options for their students, because what we know, and I know this as a parent of three girls, there is range and diversity even among the daughters in my own household.

They have different interests. They have different affinities and talents and skills. It would be crazy to think that the exact same path is going to work for each one of them.

So, we have got to have an environment where we are allowing families to access a pathway that best meets the needs of their unique children.

For some kids, that is going to be college. For some, it can be career, maybe getting into the trades as some of the other witnesses up here have discussed. Graduating high school with certifications that allow you to get right into the workforce is a tremendous thing and means that you do not have to go into debt pursuing a degree that you may not be interested in in the first place, and choice really opens up the aperture, widens the aperture so that families have options.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank you for that answer, and I appreciate the indulgence, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize Ranking Member Frost for his 5 minutes.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

No two students are the same, and students across our diverse country do need options when it comes to education, but these options have to be proven to work. Some of the proposals being uplifted today have been implemented in my state of Florida for the last 20 years while enriching private school executives, while failing students. Specifically, diverting funds from public school to poorly regulated charter and private schools.

One of my colleagues just, you know, went on a rant a little bit about how things were before. I do not want things to go completely how they were before for people like me, but I will say that I think part of what was left out of that that I think is really important to know is how much wealth and equality we have in this country versus what we had before.

That every presidency, Democrat and Republican since Ronald Reagan, the wealth and equality in this country has gotten worse and worse and worse and worse, and yes, it has put students at a disadvantage. And I know this very freshly as a 28-year-old member of the U.S. Congress, coming out, seeing the friends around me who I went to school with struggle to find work, struggle to put that 4-year degree that they have crushing student debt with to work.

Last presidency, we said you know what? You are right. My colleague is right. So many people have been sold this lie. They got the 4-year degree and now they cannot find work and they have crushing student debt. Let us alleviate some of that student debt to help them so they can start their business, so they can go to trade school, so they can do what they want to do, and it was my Republican colleagues that fought against us.

It was people—it was conservative organizations like the Heritage Foundation and attorney generals across this country that sued and sued to stop us from being able to give some relief to students in this country because of the lie that we sold them.

Ms. Vanos, you know, you are someone who started your education attending K through 12 public school. You went to law school. You are currently in the middle of your first term as a member of the Orange County School Board, and most importantly, you have two children in public schools. Three, my bad. Three students in Orange County Public Schools. Even better.

And I remember when you were talking about Adam and the amazing work he did. I actually was one of the community leaders that went to the Holocaust exhibit that he made, which I think was

really important for students to go through to learn about hate, to learn about bigotry, to learn what it looks like and what it sounds like as well, and so Adam is great and the product of a public school education.

But Ms. Vanos, as someone who grapples with the on-the-ground education issues like test scores, class size, keeping textbooks up to date, what does defunding public schools mean for our students, including your own daughters, as they progress through their education?

Ms. VANOS. Yes. I think defunding public schools has vast consequences for our public school students. I think it looks like, number one, losing highly qualified experienced teachers. I mean, our schools are nothing without our teachers, and when we cannot pay our teachers a living wage, like I said, you know, there is a teacher in my district who works a second job at Target. I see her there.

So, when we cannot retain and recruit the best teachers and minimize that teacher turnover in school, that directly impacts our students, because they build relationships with teachers. That is what keeps them coming to school.

It also looks, again, like not being able to offer extracurricular programs and sports, and I would add that a lot of our private school and home school students take advantage of those options for free.

Mr. FROST. I was going to bring up, I was just at a middle school in my district, in Orange County Public Schools, and the principal said let me show you something, and took me outside and he pointed to a private school across the street. He said we are losing students to that school because of the voucher program.

But guess what? When the school bell rings and our sports programs are out there, we are going to take a ton of those students. They are going to come over, because we are required to let them play sports at our schools, be in our school band, and we receive zip, zero for those students taking some of the resources from the public school.

Ms. VANOS. Right. Absolutely. That impacts all of our students. I mean, I could go on. Our students with disabilities can always use more help, more people. When it comes to safety, again, we pay a lot of money to have trained law enforcement officers in our school. We—parents resoundingly do not want armed guardians in our schools, and it costs money to have, you know, trained law enforcement, so that takes money.

Mr. FROST. Explain the guardian thing. Everyone might not be familiar.

Ms. VANOS. Okay. So, in Florida, you can either have a trained law enforcement officer in your school. You are required to have some kind of officer in your school. We choose, again, people from our police departments, but you could also arm someone else who has, you know, under those—some certain number of hours of training. This could be, really—

Mr. FROST. Arm a teacher?

Ms. VANOS. It could be a teacher. It could be anyone, but—yes, it can be a teacher.

Mr. FROST. A teacher, a custodian?

Ms. VANOS. Exactly.

Mr. FROST. Or someone working in the office?

Ms. VANOS. Right, right. Or a community member volunteering to do it. They have much less training.

So, unfortunately, we are having to look to other options because we are so underfunded in our state. We spend an extra \$16 million every single year just to keep our students safe in school.

Mr. FROST. Thank you. And it is obvious the Trump Administration policies are putting our students in a worse place. We heard the Superintendent talk about a lot of the students dealing with food insecurity. Well, the Big Beautiful Bill Act that was just passed, they gut nutritional assistance for our students. It is going to gut the free school meals program for many schools. That means more hungry students.

I agree with a lot of what you said on the trades. The Department of Labor, unfortunately right now, is deprioritizing important programs that help young people get into the trades. It is Workforce Innovation, Opportunity Act, and Youth Build, which I think Youth Build is one of the most important programs our country has put forth to give our students the skills they need to get into the trades.

So, I really appreciate your time, and I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. BURLISON. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Request unanimous consent to enter into the record H.R. 3345, a bill I introduced in May of this year that abolishes a Department of Education and transitions the Federal Department of Education Services to the sovereign states funded through block grants at 50 percent of the 2019 pre-COVID levels. Request unanimous consent.

Mr. BURLISON. Without objection.

Mr. BURLISON. I now recognize the gentlelady from Colorado, Ms. Boebert, for 5 minutes.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us here today.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the life and legacy of my good friend, Charlie Kirk. He was absolutely unafraid to say what millions of young Americans were starting to realize, that college for many has become a costly scam that leaves students in debt and unprepared for the real world that they are entering into.

His advocacy helped spark a national conversation about educational freedom and the need for alternatives. Today's hearing continues that work by examining how school choice and career focus pathways like apprenticeships can give students a real opportunity without the baggage of broken institutions and what they bring.

Ms. Greszler, do you agree with Charlie Kirk's statement that college has become a multitrillion dollar scam for many of the students who are left with debt and indoctrination and no job after completing those courses?

Ms. GRESZLER. Yes, for many of them it has. That is because we have a situation where the government is not creating a level playing field, but instead putting hundreds of billions of dollars a year into subsidies that the Federal Reserve has said have done more

to increase tuition than to have any positive outcomes. And at the same time as doing that, they are hampering apprenticeship programs.

When Congress created the National Apprenticeship Program, it was two pages of legislation. There are hundreds of pages of regulations that are imposed on anybody that wants to start an apprenticeship program, and the Biden Administration proposed hundreds more pages of regulations. They, fortunately, did not finalize that. But we do not need a situation like this. We need to remove the barriers and put equal playing field.

Ms. BOEBERT. Hundreds and hundreds of regulations for a two-page bill for apprenticeships. That is interesting.

It seems like something that we need to address right away. President Trump certainly has a record of deregulation.

So, are you concerned that nearly half of recent graduates are underemployed, often working jobs that never required a college degree in the first place?

Ms. GRESZLER. Absolutely, because the investment is not paying off for them. Not only are taxpayer dollars being wasted, but also those individuals are taking out tens of thousands of dollars in debt and not being able to repay it because we are lacking the market incentives to let them know what is actually a positive return on your investment.

And so, if we could get rid of the barriers that are out there, get rid of the subsidies, then more programs would be forced to not only provide a education that has positive returns, but also you would not need the Federal loans. Those programs themselves could have income-driven repayment plans. And so, they would be willing to partner with students and say, you do not have to pay tuition upfront. We are going to partner with you and we get a percentage of your earnings for a certain number of years afterwards, and that can take the Federal Government out of it completely.

Ms. BOEBERT. Interesting. And so, then it sounds like you would agree that the Federal Government has made the student debt crisis worse by prioritizing college loans over support for apprenticeships and skilled trade?

Ms. GRESZLER. Absolutely.

Ms. BOEBERT. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell, would you say that today's 4-year colleges are more focused on pushing political agendas than preparing our students for real-world, marketable skills?

Mr. MITCHELL. Yes. Thank you for the question. I think, unfortunately, what you see across the educational spectrum is that much of education, whether or not that is K-12 or even at the higher ed levels, it is not yielding the results for students that they need to be productive citizens, right?

So, the NAEP scores that were just released—the National Assessment of Educational Progress scores show that our graduating seniors are performing academically at the lowest levels in history. Now, many of those are matriculating still into colleges, and we have got to ask the question, where did all of that money get used? Because the dollars have been—you know, have increased over time.

The academic results are decreasing over time. And as we have heard from other members of this panel today, kids are leaving with more debt than they are opportunity. And so, we have got to ask some really hard questions, I think, about the entire education system and how we give families and kids more options.

Ms. BOEBERT. Yes. And would you say that many of today's college graduates are more ideologically rigid than they are job ready after leaving?

Mr. MITCHELL. Yes. One of the things that is really interesting, some research comes out of the University of Arkansas, shows that students who participate in choice programs when they are in K through 12 are actually more civically engaged, right? They have greater exposure to civil discourse, for instance, which we are in dire need of, especially on campus.

And so, I am hopeful that, as we increase choice among K-12 students, that those young adults will be more prepared to engage with the world, to engage even with others who have different views from themselves in a civil manner.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you very much, Mr. Mitchell.

Dr. HIRSCHI. Should more rural students be encouraged to pursue apprenticeships or trade careers instead of taking on debt for these 4-year degrees like they have been?

Dr. HIRSCHI. That is a hundred percent our mission. We feel like it is one of the most critical needs for our rural kids to be able to get exposed to real-world experiences and have those internship opportunities so that they can get integrated right in.

I mean, I had a kid come back who earned a welding certificate, and he was making six figures in half a year. So, there is definitely significant opportunity, which is why here in our district we are really focusing on that internship work.

Mr. BURLISON. The lady's time has expired.

Ms. BOEBERT. Oh, I am so sorry. I thought I had a minute left, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for that.

Well, thank you all for being here.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Min for 5 minutes—actually, 6 minutes.

Mr. MIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this very important issue.

I think we know that this is an important hearing, it touches on a number of very important issues, including the future health of our economy and how we can ensure high-paying jobs for Americans as technology continues to accelerate as we become an increasingly global economy.

I just want to say at the outset, however, that this Committee continues and this Subcommittee continues to dodge real oversight. We have let serious allegations of corruption, lawlessness, and blatant violations of the Constitution by Members of this Administration go completely unaddressed. My phone lines, like every other Member I know, have been inundated every day for months with concerns around the activities of DOGE, ICE, impoundments, emoluments, and so much more.

And these issues covered today, while important, are not issues that the public is demanding oversight on right now. In particular, this Committee keeps stonewalling a legitimate investigation into

Jeffrey Epstein, denying the survivor's justice. Many of our Committee Members, despite having called for greater transparency in public, have appeared to be afraid to sign a Massie-Khanna Epstein discharge petition. It needs one more vote to advance, and I would urge my colleagues on the Oversight Committee who have not signed on that petition to consider signing onto it. It is important.

This is a central issue in the minds of many Americans right now. It is a dereliction of our constitutional duty to not investigate this. It is a matter of very, very clear importance, as we learned when we talked with the survivors the other day.

On this topic, I want to start with a discussion of trades and some of the things that are at issue here. I would say with—first, maybe I will just ask a question here.

Ms. Vanos and Dr. Hirschi, do you believe every American needs to attend a two-or 4-year college to succeed? Are there alternative pathways that might allow them to achieve high-paying jobs and pathways to middle class?

I will start with Ms. Vanos.

Ms. VANOS. Answer to your question, no. I do not think every student needs to attend a 4-year—or to get a 4-year degree, a 2-year degree. I think that pursuing the trades is a great option for many, many students. And OCPS has—about 20 percent of our students take part in our college and career technical education. They can pursue industry certifications while they are also earning their high school diploma. So, I think that is a great option for many of our students.

We also have an apprenticeship program for post-secondary students where they take what they learned in high school and then they are able to work in many different industries, be able to get progressive, you know, hourly increases as they are working, gaining more skills. So, I think it is a very important part.

Mr. MIN. And Dr. Hirschi?

Dr. HIRSCHI. No. Absolutely not. We feel like there are multiple opportunities for kids to be successful in life, multiple avenues, which is why in our district we focus on making sure that every kid—we have a hundred percent of our graduating seniors have a post-high school success plan to ensure that they have a pathway and they know where they are headed.

Mr. MIN. I agree completely with what you have stated. And I would just note in our district in California, we have a number of different programs in our high schools. We have encouraged our community colleges to consider expanding here.

There are going to be a lot of needs in the 21st century for people who work with their hands, whether it is installing solar panels, whether it is serving as sous-chefs, whether it is repairing servers. There is a lot of work that we are going to need, and these can potentially be high-paying jobs.

And the best part about a lot of these jobs is that they are AI-resistant. No algorithm can install drywall or wire a breaker box. In California, the demand for skilled trades and labor is growing dramatically.

As an example of this, the California Employment Development Corporation projects significant growth in the construction sector

between the years 2022 and 2032. California is not alone in this regard, of course. Florida and Texas are seeing similar trends and projections.

So, Mr. Dillender, I guess my question to you is, do you anticipate that the surge in demand for skilled trades and labor will continue as more Baby Boomers retire?

Mr. DILLENDER. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. MIN. Fantastic. So, that, I guess, is why the Trump Administration's April 23 executive order, preparing Americans for high-paying skilled trade jobs of the future, troubles me. I think it is directionally right. It encourages more skilled trade and labor.

It is trying to increase apprenticeship programs, but the cuts to Department of Labor staff and funding, the consolidation of programs that it contains, I am told by many of my trade unions it is going to be very, very problematic for trying to achieve these goals.

Mr. Dillender, I just want to followup with you. What value do you think high school partnerships offer to students who are not planning to attend college?

Mr. DILLENDER. Look, high schools are kind of one of the areas we really focus on, especially those schools that have those trade programs that still exist. We partner with them with either materials, even equipment to make sure that the curriculum really is preparing them to come into the industry and be successful.

And so, from the high schools, it is a great opportunity. Frankly, I wish more had those type of trade programs in place. But that is where the apprentice—our program comes in. If they do not have that type of background, regardless, they can still come in, and we can still provide that apprenticeship for them and that career opportunity.

Mr. MIN. Yes. I think for a generation or two now, we have been telling students, young people, that they have to go to a 4-year college to have a chance at the middle class. I think that is wrong. It is something that we need to invest in to make sure there are pathways to the middle class for folks who do not go to a 4-year college. And I fully support these types of programs.

I want to switch topics here to the school choice question. And so, I want to turn to Ms. Vanos and Dr. Hirschi again.

Do you believe that our public schools are adequately funded? I will start with you, Dr. Hirschi.

Dr. HIRSCHI. I know that with our career center, we would not have been able to do it without the support of state and Federal funding. To bring these kind of experiences, it is essential. And, fortunately, we had a state that has invested in us. But there is no way we can provide these kind of quality experiences without having adequate funding.

Mr. MIN. Ms. Vanos?

Ms. VANOS. No. Our public schools are not fully funded. In Florida, our teachers are paid 50th in the state. When it comes to buying power of our district, we are about \$1,374 behind where we were in 2007. We are struggling, and we need help.

Mr. MIN. The Century Foundation agrees with you. They believe that the U.S. school system as an aggregate is underfunded by \$150 billion a year.

I will tell you, in California, even though we have made dramatic strides in increasing funding, we are having a teacher problem right now. We are having trouble retaining and recruiting teachers. Class sizes are increasing to about 32 kids per classroom right now.

And we know—and I will just say as an editorial comment—when I was a law school professor at UC Irvine, we are next door to the education department. And I learned very clearly at that point in time that two variables that matter most for student outcomes. They are not about choice. They are about class size and teacher quality.

Any policies we make that drain resources from our public schools and impact teacher quality and class size are going to be detrimental to the outcomes of students.

But with that, I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Mr. Min. I have three—

Mr. MIN. I would like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the following: A letter from Arc, a community organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families; a letter from Americans United for Separation of Church and State; a letter from the National Parents Union; and testimony from Christy Moreno, National Organizing Director for the National Parents Union.

Mr. BURLISON. Without objection.

Mr. MIN. Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. I also have articles to submit to the record. Article by Neetu Arnold, “Blue States Used to Lead in Education, Not Anymore”; a piece from the *Journal of School Choice*, the “Education Freedom and Student Achievement: Is More School Choice Associated with Higher State-Level Performance.” And then finally, a statement that was submitted by the Defending Education Group.

And with that, without objection, all Members have five legislative days within which to submit materials and additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

If there is no further business, without objection, this Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:16 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

