

NOTABLE QUOTABLES FROM HEARING ON DC SCHOOL CHOICE

Mayor Williams said: "I believe research has confirmed that school vouchers increase parental satisfaction, boost academic achievement of inner city African American students, and increase the likelihood that students will attend and complete college. No research, to my estimation, has proven that voucher programs are detrimental to the students who participate in them."

Mayor Williams said: "I support the desire to create a pilot scholarship program in the District. I believe if done effectively, this program would provide even more choices for primarily low-income families who currently do not have the same freedom of choice enjoyed by their affluent counterparts."

Mayor Williams said: "Tens of thousands of students are still waiting for more choices. I believe that while we are confident in our public schools and their ability to get better, it does not mean that I, as the elected mayor of our city, should ignore other educational assets that are currently at our disposal. For that reason, I welcome the federal government's interest in our District's children so that we can further uplift our public schools."

Mayor Williams said: "I don't know whether [vouchers] will be the right thing for our city in years to come but right now, today, at this moment, I believe I have an obligation to represent all the children of our city."

Mayor Williams said: "For too many years, District government officials have struggled to make improvements to our school system. Despite an infusion of local funding over the past four years, we have not seen the kinds of improvements that we had hoped to see. The challenges faced by our educators are significant and longstanding. Parents, students, and concerned citizens are calling on our city leaders to come together to make improving our children's education our highest priority.... We are working closely with all parties to seize this landmark opportunity for the federal government to address the serious needs of our public schools and our public charter schools and to provide scholarships for some students to attend nonpublic independent and parochial schools. This is about helping all of our children wherever they go to school."

Mr. Shays said: "I had an intuitive sense that I wanted to be for vouchers years ago, and I spent three years longer to do so because I was afraid of the [Connecticut Education Association] and the [National Education Association]. I was afraid that the education lobby that I love and respect would no longer support me. As soon as I did, that is exactly what happened. There was a real disincentive for me to do what I felt was right. I believe vouchers are just a no-brainer."

Mr. Shays said (to the Mayor about vouchers): "You may have gone through the process I did of saying how many of my friends am I going to offend in the community of education? And in the end, I just said I couldn't defend it anymore intellectually and practically – my opposition to what to me makes eminent sense."

Mr. Davis said: "I have traditionally opposed federal dollars going to private schools because I think federal dollars ought to be targeted to public schools. But, for the District, I think we have to ask this question: wouldn't more choices funded by federal dollars provide a needed alternative for low-income children attending low-performing schools?"

Mr. Souder said: "Do you know any member of the United States House of Representatives, if they were being offered \$45 million additional in their district in authorizing, that would oppose that bill?"

Virginia Walden Ford (DC parent) said: "You have no idea what it is like to be trapped in poor performing schools like the ones in some of our neighborhoods here in DC. For years DC parents have been told to wait and reform would come. But is it right to sacrifice the educational future of our children by waiting four more or six more years and seeing no changes or changes that come so slowly they are impossible to see."

We have a system which leaves hundreds of thousands of low-income predominantly minority children in terrible schools with low academic achievement and high rates of crime.

Parents here in the District are daily expressing their frustration in a school system that is taking too long to fix itself. Many of them have come to the point where they feel hopeless and helpless, which is often interpreted as not caring about their children. However, we have seen that, when children are placed in nurturing educational environments, they succeed and their parents become active and involved."

Councilmember Kevin Chavous said: "I close with an anecdotal reference to a parent who testified at a public hearing held by my committee on school choice in the District. The parent testified that when her first son entered the seventh grade at a DCPS middle school six years ago, there were promises and claims of reform...she kept her son in DCOS. As a result her son graduated from an academically under-performing high school. She emphatically testified that her son who was about to enter seventh grade, could not afford to wait three to six years for reform. Because of her testimony and conversations with numerous parents who are frustrated, I have become convinced that something must be done in the interim to help assure parents' children succeed.

Mr. Chairman, this is the greatest city in the World, but our true greatness remains hidden behind the closed doors of inequitable educational opportunities for all of our children. As a public official, as our citizen, I must be willing to stand up and recommend what may at first glance to be an unorthodox solution, but these are unorthodox times."

Jackie Pickney-Hackett (PTA President, Jefferson Junior High School) said: "The condition of the D.C. public schools is no secret. Our children should not be left to suffer while we wait to improve academic performance in the D.C. public schools. Even with PTA, my PTA at Jefferson, we support school choice."