

AMERICAN EDUCATION IN CRISIS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

HEARING HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC, FEBRUARY 8, 2023

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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

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AMERICAN EDUCATION IN CRISIS

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m., Room 2124 Rayburn Building, Hon. Virginia Foxx [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Foxx, Wilson of South Carolina, Thompson, Walberg, Grothman, Stefanik, Allen, Banks, Owens, Good, McClain, Miller, Kiley, Bean, Burlison, Moran, Chavez-DeRemer, Williams, Houchin, Scott, Courtney, Wilson, Bonamici, Takano, Adams, DeSaulnier, Norcross, Jayapal, Wild, McBath, Hayes, Omar, Stevens, Leger Fernandez, Manning, Mrvan, and Bowman.

Staff present: Cyrus Artz, Staff Director; Nick Barley, Deputy Communications Director; Solomon Chen, Policy Advisor; Michael Davis, Legislative Assistant; Tyler Dufrene, Research Assistant; Cate Dillon, Director of Operations; Amy Raaf Jones, Director of Education and Human Resources Policy; Alex Knorr, Staff Assistant; Marek Laco, Professional Staff Member; John Martin, Deputy Director of Workforce Policy/Counsel; Hannah Matesic, Director of Member Services and Coalitions; Audra McGeorge, Communications Director; Eli Mitchell, Legislative Assistant; Ethan Pann, Press Assistant; Gabriella Pistone, Staff Assistant; Krystina Skurk, Speechwriter; Mary Christina Riley, Professional Staff Member; Katy Roberts, Staff Assistant; Mandy Schaumburg, Chief Counsel and Deputy Director of Education Policy; Brad Thomas, Senior Education Policy Advisor; Kelly Tyroler, Professional Staff Member; Joe Wheeler, Professional Staff Member; Amaris Benavidez, Minority Professional Staff; Ilana Brunner, Minority General Counsel; Scott Estrada, Minority Professional Staff; Rashage Green, Minority Director of Education Policy; Christian Haines, Minority General Counsel; Rasheedah Hasan, Minority Clerk and Member Services; Stephanie Lalle, Minority Communications Director; Andre Lindsay, Minority Policy Associate; Kota Mizutani, Minority Deputy Communication Director; Veronique Pluiose, Minority Staff Director; Banyon Vassar, Minority IT Administrator; and Sam Varie, Minority Press Secretary.

Chairwoman FOXX. Good morning. The Committee on Education and the Workforce will come to order. Welcome everyone. I note that a quorum is present. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to call a recess at any time. The committee is meeting today to hear testimony on the State of our education system.

I am going to give a quick explanation for why we are meeting in the Judiciary Room. We had a broken water main in the Education Committee, and all our electronic equipment is inoperable. We are thankful to the Judiciary Committee for allowing us to use this room today for this very important hearing.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 8(c), opening statements are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Member, so that we may hear from the witnesses sooner and provide all members with adequate time to ask questions. I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

From elementary school to law school, the State of this Nation's education system is deeply troubling at every level. Republicans want transparency and innovative solutions to the problems in our education system, while Democrats want taxpayers to fork over their hard-earned paychecks to empower the D.C. bureaucracy.

One of my top priorities as Chairwoman of the Education Workforce Committee is to protect parental rights. During the pandemic, parents saw first-hand how poorly our current K-12 education system is serving students. These parents witnessed the education establishment put the interest of teachers' unions over the interest of their children.

Parents witnessed the educators writing political ideology instead of teaching fundamental subjects like mathematics and reading, and parents witnessed their children fall further and further behind academically. This learning loss has been devastating, causing millions of students to lose years of academic progress.

The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP, saw scores for 9-year-olds decline 5 points in reading, and 7 points in math compared to 2020. This is the largest average decline in reading since 1990 and first ever decline in math. Parents have reason to be angry and should have every opportunity to express the concerns.

Instead, they were stone wall silenced and intimidated. Some parents were even forcibly removed from school board meetings, investigated by the FBI, and called domestic terrorists. This must change. That is why we will champion the Parents Bill of Rights introduced in the last Congress, by most members of this committee led by Julia Letlow of Louisiana.

This legislation will protect the right of parents to know what their child is being taught in the classroom, as well as their right to be heard. It is time for the education complex to understand that children belong to their parents, not the State. Extending education freedom to more students will also be one of my top priorities as it has been since I came to Congress, and I am pleased to see more parents taking their child's education into their own hands since the pandemic.

There is been a surge in the creation of micro schools, home school, co-ops, and other innovative forms of education. There has also been a surge in enrollment in charter schools and private schools. This is a good thing. More competition and disruption in the modern education system means all schools will have greater incentives to serve their students well.

I am hopeful that this is a topic Republicans and Democrats can work on together, as I know we all want what is best for students.

I will also be working to protect the integrity of Title IX. We must maintain a level playing field for women and girls in sports. This is no game. Many opportunities for girls and women hinge on their participation in sports, allowing men to take the place of women on sports teams erodes decades of accomplishment and deprives women of these opportunities.

Post-secondary education means just as much transformation as K–12 education, yet the Biden administration is turning our student loan system on its head. Instead of addressing problems like the rising cost of college and poor student outcomes, Republicans will not stand by while the Biden administration attempts to enact its retroactive free college agenda.

As the institution that holds the power of the purse, we have a responsibility to protect the interest of taxpayers and ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education that enables them to repay their loans and be career ready. Republicans plan to pass common sense legislation that fixes the inherent problems in our Federal student loan and accountability systems to protect most Federal student loan and—to protect, pardon me, both borrowers and taxpayers.

You will also hear about the necessity for college cost transparency and innovation here today. We have a tremendous opportunity to advance bold, post-secondary education solutions. Finally, Republicans will also work to improve our Nation’s workforce development programs, and ensure they are delivering the skills development opportunities that workers seek and employer’s demand.

We recognize that a Baccalaureate degree is not the appropriate or necessary path for everyone, and we must support all pathways to achieving the American dream. Once again, welcome to all new and returning members. I look forward to working with you. Let us make this a productive Congress. I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member for the purpose of making an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Chairwoman Foxx follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. VIRGINIA FOXX, CHAIRWOMAN, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

From elementary school to law school, the state of this nation’s education system is deeply troubling at every level. Republicans want transparency and innovative solutions to the problems in our education system, while Democrats want taxpayers to fork over their hard-earned paychecks to empower the D.C. bureaucracy.

One of my top priorities as Chairwoman of the Education and the Workforce Committee is to protect parental rights. During the pandemic, parents saw firsthand how poorly our current K–12 education system is serving students. These parents witnessed the education establishment put the interests of teachers unions over the interests of their children. Parents witnessed educators spreading political ideology instead of teaching fundamental subjects like mathematics and reading. Parents witnessed their children fall further and further behind academically.

This learning loss has been devastating, causing millions of students to lose years of academic progress. The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) saw scores for nine-year-olds decline five points in reading and seven points in math compared to 2020. This is the largest average decline in reading since 1990 and the first-ever decline in math.

Parents have reason to be angry and should have every opportunity to express their concerns. Instead, they were stonewalled, silenced, and intimidated. Some parents were even forcibly removed from school board meetings, investigated by the FBI, and called domestic terrorists.

This must change. That is why I will champion the Parents Bill of Rights Act. Introduced last Congress by Congresswoman Julia Letlow of Louisiana, this legisla-

tion will protect the right of parents to know what their child is being taught in the classroom as well as their right to be heard. It is time for the education complex to understand that children belong to their parents, not the state.

Extending education freedom to more students will also be one of my top priorities, as it has been since I came to Congress, and I am pleased to see more parents taking their child's education into their own hands since the pandemic. There has been a surge in the creation of micro-schools, homeschool co-opts, and other innovative forms of education. There has also been a surge in enrollment in charter schools and private schools. This is a good thing. More competition and disruption in the modern education system means all schools will have greater incentives to serve their students well. I am hopeful that this is a topic Republicans and Democrats can work on together, as I know we all want what is best for students.

I will also be working to protect the integrity of Title IX. We must maintain a level playing field for women and girls in sports. This is no game. Many opportunities for girls and women hinge on their participation in sports. Allowing men to take the place of women on sports teams erodes decades of accomplishment and deprives women of these opportunities.

Postsecondary education needs just as much transformation as K–12 education. The Biden administration is turning our student loan system on its head instead of addressing problems like the rising cost of college and poor student outcomes. Republicans will not stand by while the Biden administration attempts to enact its retroactive free college agenda. As the institution that holds the power of the purse, we have a responsibility to protect the interests of taxpayers and ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education that enables them to repay their loans and be career ready.

Republicans plan to pass commonsense legislation that fixes the inherent problems in our federal student loan and accountability systems to protect both borrowers and taxpayers. You will also hear about the necessity for college cost transparency and innovation here today have a tremendous opportunity to advance bold postsecondary education solutions.

Finally, Republicans will also work to improve our nation's workforce development programs and ensure they are delivering the skills development opportunities that workers seek and employers demand. We recognize that a baccalaureate degree is not the appropriate or necessary path for everyone, and we must support all pathways to achieving the American Dream.

Once again, welcome to all new and returning members, I look forward to working with you. Let us make this a productive Congress.

Mr. SCOTT. Good morning, and thank you Dr. Foxx. When the Supreme Court decided the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, it outlawed legal discrimination in education, and said among other things, that in these days this is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if denied the opportunity of an education.

Such an opportunity where the State has undertaken to provide it is a right which needs to be made available to all on equal terms. The Court arrived at that opinion in the context of racial segregation, but in fact their analysis was clear. Access to a quality education is a right, and politics should never prevent a student from receiving a high-quality education.

In recent years Republican politicians have turned their student's classroom into the epicenter of the culture wars. The outset of the COVID–19 pandemic, republican politicians sought to force schools to reopen the classrooms to full-time, in-person instruction regardless of whether it was safe or not.

Then in 2021, despite schools and institutions clear need for additional relief funding, the republican lawmakers did nothing to meaningfully help them reopen safely to help students recover from the pandemic. In fact, every congressional republican voted against the American Rescue Plan, which Democrats passed to provide

funding to make it actually possible to open the schools safely, keep them open safely, and to make up the lost learning.

Of course, academic scores have been down. Students were out of school for a year, maybe even more, and the American Rescue Plan provided the resources to open safely and make sure that we could make up for lost learning with things like after school programs, summer programs, counselors, and tutors. Those cost money, and the American Rescue Plan provided that money.

Now instead of working with Democrats to address the real issues in schools and institutions, republican lawmakers are prioritizing cultural wars and investigations, that is in fact the number of bills introduced across the country to restrict teaching about certain topics or educational gag orders, increased in 2022 by 250 percent compared to 2021.

Several republicans led states advanced anti-LGBTQ bills, like Florida's Don't Say Gay Bill. One CEO said that the LGBT youth suicide and crisis prevention leads to youth suicide and crisis prevention organization said that these bills only add to existing stigma and discrimination, which puts these young people at greater risk of bullying, depression, and even suicide.

Republican politicians have also supported and implemented policies to ban books, censor curriculum and textbooks at every level of learning, and punish teachers for accurately recounting our Nation's history. Worse, we have seen the proliferation of verbal and physical threats at typically tedious school board meetings.

Florida adopted the so-called Individual Freedom Measure, which banned educators from teaching certain topics related to race. In my home State the Governor established an emergency hotline regarding the teacher teaching critical race theory in K through 12. That dedicated phone line was shut down since there were no complaints about CRT being taught in elementary and secondary schools, and that is maybe because it is only taught in a few law schools.

Educational gag orders are a distraction and do not address the public's concerns about the academic success and well-being of America's students. Many of these attacks have been launched under the guise of transparency and expanded parent's rights. While parental engagement is critical for a student's success, bills introduced have been crafted to give a vocal minority the power to impose personal beliefs over all students.

Even worse, Republican politicians holding educators hostage by forcing them to choose between extremist views, or fully funded classrooms. For example, in K through 12 schools in South Carolina and Tennessee, Republican lawmakers passed legislation to withhold badly needed funding from schools because of their curriculum.

Slashing support for students has not stopped there. The Republicans Attorney General is suing to prevent over 40 million eligible student loan borrowers from accessing student loan relief. Congressional Republicans are simultaneously introducing legislation that would make severe cuts to programs and help students afford a college degree. congressional Republicans are also opposing the expansion of registered apprenticeship programs. Our most successful workforce development program. We know that 93 percent of ap-

prentices who complete a registered apprenticeship retain employment with an average salary of 70 to \$7,000.00.

One recent study found that for every dollar a business invests in the registered apprenticeship program, they earn \$1.44 back. These programs are a win/win for workers and businesses, and yet we are ignoring the effectiveness of registered apprenticeships, and advocate diversion of funding to untested models called Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs or IRAPs.

IRAPs do not have the guaranteed quality and national recognition that registered apprenticeships have. This Congress, congressional Democrats plan to reintroduce legislation to help every student reach his or her full potential. First, the Rebuild America's Schools Act and Students and Diversity Act and the Equity Inclusion Enforcement Act will help modernize healthy school buildings so students can learn safely, eliminate inequities in education, and provide families with a legal remedy for students to address disparities in education.

More options for schools to achievement, NOW Act, the Loan Act, make sure that all Americans can have more access to affordable and higher education. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the National Apprenticeship Act will fully fund evidence-based job training and apprenticeship programs to prepare individuals for our modern economy.

These legislative priorities are rooted in evidence and research and will take into account the real concerns facing students, parents, educators and communities. I hope my colleagues on the committee will stop putting—will put—stop putting politics over people and put people over politics and join Democrats in addressing the most pressing issues facing our Nation's students. With that Madam Chair, I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ranking Member Scott follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

Good morning. Thank you, Dr. Foxx.

When the Supreme Court decided the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, it outlawed legal segregation in education, and said—among other things—that, “In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”

The Court arrived at that opinion in the context of racial segregation. In fact, their analysis was clear: access to a quality education is a right and politics should never prevent a student from receiving a high-quality education. In recent years, Republican politicians have turned our students' classrooms into the epicenter of their culture wars.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Republican politicians sought to force schools to reopen classrooms for full-time, in-person instruction, regardless of whether it was safe or not.

Then, in 2021, despite schools' and institutions' clear need for additional relief funding, Republican lawmakers did nothing to meaningfully help them reopen safely or help students recover from the pandemic. In fact, every Congressional Republican voted against the American Rescue Plan, which Democrats passed to provide funding to make it actually possible to open the schools safely, keep them open safely, and make up for lost learning.

Of course, academic scores have been down. Students were out of school for a year—maybe even more. The American Rescue Plan provided the resources to open safely and make sure that we could make up for lost learning with things like after-

school programs, summer programs, counselors, and tutors. Those cost money, and the American Rescue Plan provided that money.

Now, instead of working with Democrats to address the real issues in schools and institutions, Republican lawmakers are prioritizing culture wars and investigations. In fact, the number of bills introduced across the country to restrict teaching about certain topics, or “educational gag orders,” increased in 2022 by 250 percent, compared to 2021.

Several Republican-led states have advanced anti-LGBTQ bills, like Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill. One CEO who leads a youth suicide and crisis prevention organization, said that these bills “only add to the existing stigma and discrimination, which puts these young people at greater risk for bullying, depression, and even suicide.”

Republican politicians have also supported and implemented policies to ban books; censor curriculum and textbooks at every level of learning; and punish teachers for accurately recounting our nation’s history. Worse, we have seen the proliferation of verbal and physical threats at typically tedious school board meetings.

Florida adopted the so-called “Individual Freedom” measure, which banned educators from teaching certain topics related to race. In my home state, the governor established an emergency hotline regarding the teaching of Critical Race Theory in K–12. That dedicated phone line was shut down since there were no complaints about CRT being taught in elementary or secondary schools. That is maybe because it is only taught in a few law schools.

Educational gag orders are a distraction and do not address the public’s concerns about the academic success and wellbeing of America’s students. Many of these attacks have been launched under the guise of transparency and expanding parents’ rights. While parental engagement is critical for a student’s success, the bills introduced have been crafted to give a vocal minority the power to impose personal beliefs over all students.

Even worse, Republican politicians are holding educators hostage by forcing them to choose between extremist views or fully-funded classrooms.

For example, in K–12 schools in South Carolina and Tennessee, Republican lawmakers passed legislation to withhold badly needed funding from schools because of their curriculum. Slashing support for students has not stopped there.

Republican Attorneys General are suing to prevent over 40 million eligible student loan borrowers from accessing student loan relief while Congressional Republicans are simultaneously introducing legislation that would make severe cuts to programs that help students afford a college degree.

Congressional Republicans are also opposing the expansion of Registered Apprenticeship programs—our most successful workforce development program. We know that 93 percent of apprentices who complete a Registered Apprenticeship retains employment, with an average annual salary of \$77,000. One recent study found that, for every dollar a business invests in a Registered Apprenticeship program, they earn \$1.44 back. These programs are a win-win for workers and businesses, yet we are ignoring the effectiveness Registered Apprenticeships and they advocate for a diversion funding to untested models, called Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs, or IRAPs. IRAPs do not have the guaranteed quality and national recognition that Registered Apprenticeships have.

This Congress, Congressional Democrats plan to reintroduce legislation to help every student reach his or her full potential.

First, the Rebuild America’s Schools Act, the Strength in Diversity Act, and the Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act will help modernize healthy school buildings so students can learn safely, eliminate inequities in education, and provide families with a legal remedy for students to address disparities in education.

The Lowering Obstacles to Achievement Now Act, the LOAN Act, will ensure that all Americans can have more access to affordable higher education.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the National Apprenticeship Act will fully-fund evidence-based job training and apprenticeship programs to prepare individuals for our modern economy.

These legislative priorities are rooted in evidence and research and will take into account the real concerns facing students, parents, educators, and communities.

I hope my colleagues on the Committee will stop putting politics over people, put people over politics, and join Democrats in addressing the most pressing issues facing our nation’s students.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Representative Scott. Without objection, all of the members who wish to insert written statements

into the record may do so by submitting them to the committee clerk electronically in Microsoft Word format by 5 p.m., 14 days after the day of this hearing, February 22, 2023.

I will now introduce our witnesses. Ms. Virginia Gentles is the Director of the Education Freedom Center with Independent Women's Forum. Dr. Monty Sullivan. Dr. Monty Sullivan is the President of Louisiana Community and Technical College System located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mr. Jared is the Governor of Colorado and a former colleague who served admirably on this committee. For our final witness, I yield to Representative Owens for the introduction.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to this committee Mr. Scott Pulsipher, President of Western Governors University, WGU, headquartered in my district in Salt Lake City, Utah. After more than 20 years in the private sector, Mr. Pulsipher came to WGU in 2016, and has proven himself to be a game change in postsecondary education.

WGU is the Nation's first and largest competency-based university and his leadership and institution has continued to drive innovation to continue to improve student's outcomes in Utah and across the country. Thank you, Mr. Pulsipher, for coming before this Committee. I look forward to hearing from you today.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much Mr. Owens. We thank all our witnesses for being here today, and we look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your written statements, and that they will appear in full in the hearing record.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 8D and committee practice, each of you is asked to limit your oral presentation to a 5-minute summary of your written statement. The witnesses are aware of their responsibility to provide accurate information to the subcommittee, and therefore we will proceed with their testimony.

Before you begin your testimony, please remember to press the button on the microphone in front of you so that it will turn on and the members can hear you. As you begin to speak the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, the light will turn yellow to signal that you have 1 minute remaining. When the light turns red, your 5 minutes have expired and we ask that you please wrap up.

As a longstanding committee practice, we will let the entire panel make their presentations before we move to member questions. When answering a question, please remember to once again to turn your microphone on, and then off when finished. I will first recognize Ms. Gentles.

STATEMENT OF VIRGINIA GENTLES, DIRECTOR, EDUCATION FREEDOM CENTER, INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM, WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA

Mrs. GENTLES. Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear today. My name is Virginia Gentles, and I am the mother of two school-aged children, and the director of the Education Freedom Center at Independent Women's Forum.

Before I delve into the significant challenges our students, teachers, and families are facing, I want to highlight two positive developments, and the first is the expansion of education freedom. Iowa and Utah passed laws last month creating K–12 education savings account programs, and last year Arizona established the gold standard for education freedom by expanding eligibility for the state’s existing ESA programs to cover all 1.1 million Arizona students.

Second, policymakers are acknowledging the widespread failure of balanced literacy reading programs and starting to require phonics-based reading instruction. As legislators who regularly hear from distraught parents, you are familiar with the bad news. We are faced with alarming learning loss fueled by the potent combination of COVID-era school closures and the prioritization of activism over academic instruction.

Pervasive discipline and mental health issues that are creating an unsafe environment for students and teachers, school systems that are determined to view parents as the enemy; and powerful teachers’ unions and education bureaucrats that reject transparency and accountability, yet relentlessly demand more funding.

We must acknowledge the pernicious influence of the teachers’ unions. These powerful organizations seek to expand their partisan political influence, and control working conditions. They do not aspire to improve education. Union roadblocks appeared at the outset of the COVID-era school closures, and they continued into 2021, with leaders colluding with the CDC to draft restrictive reopening guidance.

Union leaders and union supported school board members cannot and should not escape accountability for the learning loss crisis they exacerbated. Fourth and eighth grade math and reading scores on the 2022 nation’s report card significantly dropped since students were last tested in 2019. Only one-quarter of eighth grade students met math proficiency standards.

Chaotic classrooms are driving talented teachers to quit, likely accelerating learning loss. According to Federal data schools are plagued with chronic absenteeism, a significant increase in behavioral issues, and an increase in verbal abuse and disrespect toward teachers.

School districts’ excessively lenient discipline policies leave teachers without the tools they need to address these challenges. In theory, mental health support could help children, but many parents are concerned about the consequences of funneling more money into school counselors that are represented by an association that embraces radical ideologies.

Unfortunately, too many forces within the education system insist on prioritizing the promotion of ideologies over academic instruction. Polls consistently reveal that most people do not want children to be bombarded with activist-drafted materials, and lessons, and books that are pushing radical gender ideology, and instructing young children that they can be born in the wrong body,

School policies that secretly socially transition children, hiding their new names, identities, and bathroom, locker room, and overnight trip accommodations from parents through Gender Support Plans are based on the assumption that the only acceptable re-

sponse to children who express a desire for a new name and identity is immediate and unquestioning affirmation.

School staff are pushing highly sensitive girls regardless of their mental health struggles, down a one-way path to medical transition, and school staff who do not adhere to this radical belief system are punished. School districts are citing non-existent Title IX related requirements as the pretext for hiding information from parents. This must stop.

Congress can address one Title IX issue by supporting Congressman Greg Steube's Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act, which will end the practice of allowing biological males to take awards, roster spots, and scholarships from female athletes.

Parents deserve power over their children's education. The education bureaucrats and unions hold all the power in states without education freedom. Supporting the Parent's Bill of Rights Act introduced by Representative Julia Letlow will acknowledge parents' fundamental rights and the importance of curriculum, budget, and student record transparency.

Students must be allowed to escape the residentially assigned public schools that are not effectively educating them. The Educational Choice for Children's Act will create a K-12 Federal scholarship tax credit and give parents the purchasing power to pay for tuition, tutoring, or technology.

It is time for funding to follow the child to the education option that best meets his or her needs. Leaders of the public K-12 education system continue to demand funding increases, but the Federal Government already provided more than 190 billion in emergency supplemental education funding, primarily in the form of elementary and secondary school emergency relief, or ESSR funds.

The money was largely not needed, or used to facilitate school reopening, and many districts have not yet spent the funds. I am the mother of a sixth and a ninth grader, so I have a front row seat to the failures of our educational system. We need legislators to hold the K-12 cartel accountable for the learning loss crisis it created, and pass legislation that provides families with educational transparency and freedom. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Gentles follows:]



Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Hearing: American Education in Crisis

**Virginia Gentles
Director, Education Freedom Center
Independent Women's Forum
February 8, 2023**

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear today.

My name is Virginia Gentles, and I am the mother of two school-age children and the director of the Education Freedom Center at Independent Women's Forum. IWF is a non-profit organization that advances policies that enhance people's freedom, opportunities, and well-being. The IWF Education Freedom Center¹ informs the public about education policies that harm students and disempower parents and encourages the creation of educational options that focus on academic achievement and create safe environments for students to learn and thrive.

I am here today to discuss the state of K-12 education in our country. Before I delve into the significant challenges our students, teachers, and families are facing, I want to highlight two positive developments. The first is the expansion of education freedom. Two states, Iowa and Utah, passed laws last month creating K-12 education savings account programs, and more states plan to follow their lead this year.² Last year, Arizona established the gold standard for education freedom by expanding eligibility for the state's existing empowerment scholarship account program to cover all 1.1 million Arizona students.

¹ IWF Education Freedom Center: <https://www.iwf.org/efc>.

² Ingraham, Keri. "Two States Now Have Universal School Choice — And Yours Could Be Next." The Federalist. January 27, 2023. <https://www.iwf.org/2023/01/27/two-states-now-have-universal-school-choice-and-yours-could-be-next/>

Second, policymakers are acknowledging the widespread failure of “balanced literacy” reading programs that were a lucrative marketing and contracting triumph for the instructional materials industry and an absolute failure for a generation of students.³ States are starting to require “phonics-based” reading instruction, and parents are beginning to understand *why* the nation’s literacy scores are abysmal, thanks in part to Emily Hanford’s powerful series, “Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong.”⁴

That’s about the extent of the good news. As legislators who regularly hear from distraught parents, you are all familiar with the bad news. After years of instruction disrupted by cruel COVID-era closures and masking policies and undermined by divisive ideologies, K-12 education in the United States is in crisis. We are faced with:

- Alarming learning loss fueled by the potent combination of COVID-era closures and the prioritization of indoctrination over academic instruction;⁵
- Pervasive discipline and mental health issues that are creating an unsafe environment for students and teachers;⁶
- School systems determined to view parents as the enemy; and
- Powerful teachers’ unions and education bureaucracies that reject transparency and accountability, yet relentlessly demand more funding.

We must acknowledge the pernicious influence of the teachers’ unions. These powerful organizations seek to expand their partisan political influence, raise funds, and control working conditions. They do not aspire to improve education. In fact, National Education Association (NEA) members voted against a business item in 2019 calling to “re-dedicate itself to the pursuit of increased student learning in every public school in America by

³ Gentles, Ginny. “Two Truths And A Lie: Literacy.” Independent Women’s Forum. April 12, 2022.

<https://www.iwf.org/2022/04/12/two-truths-and-a-lie-literacy/>.

⁴ Hanford, Emily. “Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong.” American Public Media.

<https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>.

⁵ Gentles, Ginny. “Policy Focus: Learning Loss.” IWF. May 4, 2022.

<https://www.iwf.org/2022/05/04/policy-focus-learning-loss/>.

⁶ Morabito, Angela. “The Kids Aren’t Alright: Classroom Behavior Takes Nosedive Post-COVID.” IWF. August 4, 2022.

<https://www.iwf.org/2022/08/04/the-kids-arent-alright-classroom-behavior-takes-nosedive-post-covid/>.

putting a renewed emphasis on quality education.⁷ Union roadblocks appeared at the outset of the COVID-era school closures, with some local teachers' unions instructing teachers to not teach new material. In the summer of 2020, unions encouraged members to send fake body bags, coffins, and obituaries to governors and local leaders and filled social media with warnings that teachers would die if schools opened.⁸ The resistance to opening schools continued into 2021, with union leaders colluding with the Biden administration's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to draft restrictive reopening guidance in order to strengthen their local bargaining positions.⁹

Academic Decline

Union leaders and union-supported school board members cannot and should not escape accountability for the learning loss crisis they exacerbated.¹⁰ Scores on the 2022 Nation's Report Card, or National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), significantly dropped since students were last tested in 2019 in both math and reading for both fourth and eighth grade.

Only one-quarter of eighth graders met math proficiency standards. Math scores for eighth-graders declined in 51 out of 53 states and jurisdictions, with students in 90% of states losing at least a half year of learning and students in 18 states losing a full year.¹¹ Eighth-grade reading scores only rose in Catholic schools and the Department of Defense schools and declined in 33 states and jurisdictions.¹² One-quarter of fourth-grade students

⁷ Tapscott, Mark. "Bill To Repeal NEA's Federal Charter Could Light Reform Match Within Teachers' Union." *The Epoch Times*. April 19, 2022. <https://www.iwv.org/2022/04/bill-to-repeal-neas-federal-charter-could-light-reform-match-within-teachers-union/>

⁸ Gentles, Ginny. "Two Truths And A Lie: Parents Taking Control Of Children's Education." IWF. July 19, 2022. <https://www.iwvfora.org/2022/07/19/two-truths-and-a-lie-parents-taking-control-of-childrens-education/>

⁹ "Interim Findings: Union Officials Wrote Key Portions of the Biden Administration's School Reopening Guidance Staff Report." Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Minority. March 30, 2022. <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/AFT-CDC-Interference-Interim-Report-3-30-2022.pdf>

¹⁰ White, Kaylee McGhee. "Government Leaders, Not The Pandemic, Are Responsible For Abysmal Academic Performance." *Washington Examiner*. October 26, 2022.

¹¹ Gentles, Ginny. "The K-12 Cartel Flunked The Nation's Report Card." IWF. October 24, 2022.

<https://www.iwvfora.org/2022/10/24/the-k-12-cartel-flunked-the-nations-report-card/>

¹² Porter-Magee, Kathleen. "Amid the Pandemic, Progress in Catholic Schools." *Wall Street Journal*. October 27, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amid-the-pandemic-progress-in-catholic-schools-partnership-naep-report-card-math-reading-public-charter-black-hispanic-11666902117>

scored below basic in math, meaning they are not able to perform grade-level skills. Approximately one-third of fourth-grade students tested below basic in reading.

Student performance was already declining before teachers' unions and school district bureaucrats insisted on prolonged COVID-era school closures. The scores reflect "realized generational decline," and United States Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has observed that "the pandemic simply made it worse."¹³

Worsening School Climate

Chaotic classrooms are driving talented teachers to quit, according to surveys, likely accelerating learning loss.¹⁴ According to federal data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), schools are plagued with chronic absenteeism among students and teachers, a significant increase in behavioral issues, and rising incidents of verbal abuse and disrespect toward teachers.¹⁵ The majority of schools surveyed by the federal government reported increases in classroom disruptions and physical violence. Unions and district leaders shut students out of classrooms and canceled activities during the COVID era, leaving children without robust academic instruction or meaningful social interaction. The lengthy, isolating periods of languishing on screens harmed students academically, behaviorally, and emotionally. The nation's students returned to classrooms with deteriorated behavior and lagging social skills, and school districts' excessively lenient "discipline" policies left teachers without the tools to address the resulting chaos. In theory, mental health support could help children. But the parents I speak to are concerned about the consequences of funneling more money into school counselors that are represented by an association that embraces so-called "antiracism" and gender identity ideologies.¹⁶

¹³ Perez Jr., Juan. "American test scores prompt 'a moment of truth' for schools." Politico. October 24, 2022. <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/24/american-test-scores-schools-00063067>.

¹⁴ Ward, Micah. "Student behavior is the leading cause for teachers leaving." District Administration. July 22, 2022. <https://districtadministration.com/student-behavior-is-the-leading-cause-for-teachers-leaving/>.

¹⁵ "Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2021." National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. June 28, 2022. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022092>.

¹⁶ "Doctor Sounds Alarm on 'Transgender Assembly Line.'" IWF Identity Crisis Series. October 20, 2022. <https://www.iwf.org/identity-crisis-dr-grossman/>.

Harmful Ideological Indoctrination in Schools

Unfortunately, too many forces within the education system insist on prioritizing the promotion of ideologies over academic instruction.¹⁷ Federal, state, and local policies that embrace and enforce gender and other divisive ideologies in the K-12 education system pressure students to define themselves by their racial, sexual, and gender identity. Polls consistently reveal that most people don't want children to be bombarded with activist-drafted materials, books, and lessons pushing radical gender ideology.¹⁸ The vast majority of parents certainly do not want teachers instructing young children that they can be born in the wrong body and that doctors guess a baby's gender at birth and sometimes get it wrong. We can hopefully all agree that schools should not tell girls with underlying mental health problems that adopting a new gender identity is the best, or only, way to relieve emotional distress.

In the course of this hearing, we likely will address multiple aspects of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, including the Biden administration's plans to mandate school policies that secretly socially transition children, hiding their new names, identities, and bathroom, locker room, and overnight trip accommodations from parents through so-called "Gender Support Plans."¹⁹ These plans are based on the radical assumption that the only acceptable response to children who express a desire for a new name and "gender identity" is immediate and unquestioning affirmation. This assumption flies in the face of the recommendations of comprehensive medical reviews conducted in countries such as the United Kingdom and Sweden.

School staff are pushing highly sensitive girls—regardless of their struggles with depression, anxiety, obsessive rumination, or eating disorders—down a one-way path to medical transition, which includes puberty blockers, cutting off their breasts ("top surgery"), sterilization, permanent loss of sexual function, and a lifetime of high-risk

¹⁷ Gentles, Ginny. "School Choice Can Save Children From Radical Gender Ideology." Washington Examiner. August 18, 2022. <https://www.iwf.org/2022/08/18/school-choice-can-save-children-from-radical-gender-ideology/>

¹⁸ "Parents Defending Education Poll: 62% of voters think gender identity activists 'going too far.'" Parents Defending Education. July 27, 2022. <https://defendinged.org/press-releases/parents-defending-education-poll-62-percent-of-voters-think-gender-identity-activists-going-too-far/>.

¹⁹ IWF Title IX Resource Center: <https://www.iwf.org/title-ix-resource-center/>.

testosterone injections (“gender-affirming care”).²⁰ Public school policies punish school staff who do not adhere to this radical belief system. At a child’s request, schools keep the Gender Support Plan and the student’s new name and identity a secret from parents. To be clear, Title IX does not mandate these policies at this point, yet too many school districts are citing non-existent Title IX requirements as the pretext for hiding information from parents.

One specific Title IX-related policy area that can be addressed early in this Congress is the protection of women’s sports.²¹ Forcing female athletes to compete against biological males is unfair and discriminatory. Congressman Greg Steube has introduced the Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act²² which will end the practice of allowing biological males to take awards, roster spots, scholarships, or spots at a school from female athletes.

Unions and Bureaucrats Versus Parents and Students

Parents want and deserve power over their children’s education, but education bureaucrats and unions hold all the power in areas without education freedom. Parents have a right to direct the upbringing, care, and education of their children, and they do not simply turn children over to government schools with the assumption that the school will make every decision—without parental input. Efforts to introduce the Parents Bill of Rights²³ legislation that couples the acknowledgment of parents’ fundamental rights with curriculum, budget, and student record transparency requirements are a step in the right direction.

Rather than take responsibility for failing to educate students or acknowledge parents’ requests for transparency, responsiveness, and respect, leaders of the public K-12 education system continue to demand funding increases. The federal government already provided more than \$190 billion in “emergency” supplemental education funding, however, primarily in the form of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

²⁰ IWF “Identity Crisis” documentary series: <https://www.iwf.org/identity-crisis/>.

²¹ IWF Women’s Sports Resource Center: <https://www.iwf.org/womens-sports-resource-center/>.

²² “Rep. Greg Steube Reintroduces Legislation to Save Women’s Sports.” February 1, 2023.

<https://steube.house.gov/media/press-releases/rep-greg-steube-reintroduces-legislation-to-save-women-s-sports>

²³ “Congresswoman Letlow Announces the Parents Bill of Rights Act.” November 17, 2021.

<https://letlow.house.gov/media/press-releases/congresswoman-letlow-announces-parents-bill-rights-act>

(ESSER) funds.²⁴ The funding was quickly provided to states in three installments, including the massive American Rescue Plan (ARP) spending blowout. The money was largely not needed or used to facilitate school re-opening. Many districts have not spent the funds.²⁵ Please hold school districts and superintendents accountable for the massive infusion in COVID-era federal supplemental funding.

We must rethink the current education funding model that pours over \$750 billion annually in federal, state, and local education funding into a failed and bloated system. An entrenched, activist education bureaucracy continues to grow in size and strength. Over the last 20 years, public K-12 administrative staff has increased by 88%, while student enrollment only increased by 8%.²⁶ Inflation-adjusted public school funding has risen by 152% since 1970, but teacher salaries have only increased by 8%.²⁷ School districts have become contracting machines that enrich corporations peddling ideologically-infused professional development, questionable social-emotional learning materials, and highly-intrusive student surveys, rather than children's minds. It's time for funding to follow the child to the education option that best meets his or her needs.

Solutions to the Education Crisis

Students must be allowed to escape the residentially-assigned public schools that are not effectively educating them. Systems must be forced to pay a price for ignoring the needs of parents and students. The Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA)²⁸ will create a

²⁴ "ESSER Expenditure Dashboard." Edunomics Lab. Georgetown University. <https://edunomicslab.org/esser-spending/>.

²⁵ "Education Stabilization Fund Transparency Portal." U.S. Department of Education. Accessed February 2, 2023. <https://covid-relief-data.ed.gov/>.

²⁶ Table 213.10. Staff employed in public elementary and secondary school systems, by type of assignment: Selected years, 1949-50 through fall 2019 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_213.10.asp) and Table 203.10. Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by level and grade: Selected years, fall 1980 through fall 2030 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_203.10.asp). Digest of Education Statistics. National Center for Education Statistics. Institute for Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education.

²⁷ Table 236.55. Total and current expenditures per pupil in public elementary and secondary schools: Selected years, 1919-20 through 2018-19 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_236.55.asp) and Table 211.50. Estimated average annual salary of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools: Selected years, 1959-60 through 2020-21 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_211.50.asp). Digest of Education Statistics. National Center for Education Statistics. Institute for Education Sciences. U.S. Department of Education.

²⁸ "Scott, Cassidy, Daines, Young Introduce Educational Choice for Children Act." June 16, 2022. <https://www.scott.senate.gov/media-center/press-releases/scott-cassidy-daines-young-introduce-educational-choice-for-children-act>.

K-12 federal scholarship tax credit and give parents the purchasing power to choose the school or education service that works best for their child. Parents could access funding for tuition, tutoring to address learning loss, special needs services, or education technology. The proposal does not involve the U.S. Department of Education because scholarships are funded by individual and corporate donations to non-profit scholarship-granting organizations in the states. The donors receive a non-refundable federal tax credit.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted a report to the Secretary of Education that concluded that the nation was at risk due to the failures of the educational system.²⁹ The Commission was created in response to the “widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system.” The report concluded, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.”

In a letter to the Secretary, the Commission’s chairman wrote, “the problems we have discerned in American education can be both understood and corrected if the people of our country, together with those who have public responsibility in the matter, care enough and are courageous enough to do what is required.” I was in elementary school when the report was written. I’m the mother of a sixth and ninth grader now, so I have a front-row seat to the current failures of our educational system. We were a nation at risk in 1983 and remain so in 2023.

Parents, students, and educators need legislators to be more than just caring and courageous. We need you to: hold the K-12 cartel accountable for the learning loss crisis exacerbated by COVID-era policies; determine how states and districts spent the \$190 billion in “emergency” federal funding; ensure that the new mental health funding truly helps students, rather than lines the pockets of activists; and pass legislation that provides families with educational transparency and freedom. Our country’s students deserve safe

²⁹ “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.” The National Commission on Excellence in Education. U.S. Department of Education. April 1983.
<https://web.archive.org/web/2020102922248/https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>

classroom environments dedicated to academic instruction, a path out of the learning loss crisis created by the public school system, and the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much for being right on time. We will now hear from Dr. Sullivan.

**STATEMENT OF DR. MONTY SULLIVAN, PRESIDENT,
LOUISIANA COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM**

Mr. SULLIVAN. Good morning. Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee. I am Monty Sullivan, President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, and President of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, a national coalition of State and individual community college systems.

On behalf of Louisiana's 12 2-year institutions, and the more than 150,000 students that we serve annually, as well as RAMC, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. With each information cycle and technological advancement, the skills requirements of the workplace are ever increasing.

We are already far behind, as reflected in our Nation's near-record 11 million unfilled jobs. Louisiana leads the Nation in this category with unfilled vacancies. At the same time, we have people sitting on the sidelines, who want to work, but have not yet obtained the education and skills needed to participate in the modern economy.

The United States labor force participation rate was 62.4 percent in January. That is down from 67 percent two decades ago. We have far too many people on the sidelines not participating in the economy. The market for talent is exceptionally tight and seems to be growing tighter by the day.

Central to this policy must be the recognition that almost every good job in America requires participation beyond high school, perhaps college, perhaps on the job skills, but beyond high school. With that perspective, the following are recommendations to the committee.

First and foremost, expand Pell Grants to cover short-term workforce programs. The single most important step Congress can take on behalf of the 60 million Americans with a high school diploma or less. Let that sink in. It is to authorize the use of Pell Grants for workforce programs.

Students need the shortest and least expensive pathway to employment and opportunity for advancement throughout their lives. In the last 3 years, our community colleges in Louisiana have served over 15 thousand students who graduated with these credentials. Students completing these programs have strong job placement rates above 90 percent and have a demonstrated wage improvement of well over 20 percent from the prior year.

More broadly in Louisiana, we have a recognized earnings premium for our students who complete short-term workforce programs that is greater than the initial earnings of those students who gain credentials from credit-based programs that are Pell eligible. Clearly, these short-term credentials are demonstrating value to employers, yet these shorter-term programs are reserved for those who have money in their pockets and will not require Pell Grants to attend college.

Effectively, we are limiting the ability of a broad swath of Americans to quickly gain the skills needed to obtain a good job. I congratulate you, Chairwoman Foxx, along with Representative

Stefanik, Banks, Hinson, and Thompson for your vision, and bringing forward the Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning Act which RAMC has endorsed.

I also appreciate the several other efforts in Congress to expand Pell Grants for short-term programs, and strongly urge Congress to come to a consensus on this issue.

Point two, updated and improved WIOA. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Louisiana has 15 workforce development areas, each with its own local board led by a business representative. Collectively, in program year ending 2022, Louisiana serves 5,655 individuals in “training services,” which places Louisiana above the national average, yet it pales in comparison to the 180,000 vacancies that we have in Louisiana.

We simply cannot get to the goal continuing down the path we are on today. The following are recommendations I would make to you around WIOA. First and foremost, require more WIOA funds to be targeted toward workforce training accounts. Improve coordination with the Higher Education Act. Individuals do not understand the difference between Federal policy and WIOA, and Higher Education Act. Streamline those processes.

Maintain the requirement for State and local boards to be led by businesses. Allow for more flexibility in establishing enhanced accountability systems with providers and provide better labor market information. Finally, strengthen the role of community colleges as we think about the development and the growth of our workforce system.

Point three, we must establish a no wrong door approach to education and workforce attainment. While the effort is intended to lower and eliminate barriers to access education employment, current policies too often place the highest barriers in front of those with the greatest need.

Point four, and the final point, developing America’s talent is the responsibility of the education system, but also business partners. They cannot do it alone. We have great examples in Louisiana business partnerships. Our friends at General Dynamics IT are located on the campus of Bossier Parrish Community College with over 1,000 employees right there on the college campus.

In the New Orleans market, our Mechatronics apprenticeship program brings together three LCTCS colleges to meet the needs of the greater manufacturing sector. In closing, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today. Education is indeed the anecdote to the ills of this Nation.

We know that our people and our economy will be more resilient, dynamic, and future ready if we can free ourselves from historical structures and reconceptualize the systems for the modern world. Can you image—can you imagine an America where every single household has one college credential, or industry-based certification that supports that household? I can imagine that America. Together we can get there. Thank you for the opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Sullivan follows:]

STATEMENT OF DR. MONTY SULLIVAN, PRESIDENT, LOUISIANA COMMUNITY AND
TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee. I am Monty Sullivan, President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) and President of Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC), a coalition of state and individual community college systems from across the country that share the belief that community colleges are one of America's primary solutions to building a strong, more competitive workforce and therefore, a strong middle class. On behalf of Louisiana's twelve two-year colleges and the 150,000 students we serve each year, as well as RAMC, thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss what I see as a crisis in our nation's education and workforce system.

With each information cycle and technological advancement, the skill requirements of the workplace are ever increasing. Last week, the President of Microsoft, Brad Smith, wrote a blogpost noting the advance in artificial intelligence expected by 2033 would instead be here in 2023. He and others have signaled the profound impact this new technology will have on jobs and education. This is just one example of why we need to ensure our nation's system of education and workforce development can provide the skills that individuals will need to succeed in our ever-changing economy.

We are already far behind, as reflected in our nation's near-record 11 million unfilled job openings. Louisiana leads the nation in unfilled jobs, and we are also expecting tens of thousands of new jobs to materialize from the shift to a new energy economy, and a rapidly expanding industrial sector in fields like liquefied natural gas (LNG) and chemical manufacturing. Not to mention health care workforce shortages, which are impacting the daily care of those in Louisiana and throughout the country. The market for talent is exceptionally tight and seems to be growing tighter by the day.

At the same time, we have people sitting on the sidelines who want to work but have not yet obtained the education and skills needed to participate in the modern economy. The United States labor force participation rate was 62.4 percent in January, a rate that has been dropping for the last several decades from when it was 67 percent. This translates into millions of more individuals not in today's labor force.

With relatively low labor force participation rates, we have a significant pool of untapped talent stranded in this economy. We must forge a policy environment that broadens opportunity in this nation. Central to this policy must be the recognition that almost every good job in America requires preparation beyond a standard high school diploma. Therefore, every American needs some level of education and skills beyond high school whether gained at college, on the job, or even through a free MOOC. In addressing this issue from a policy perspective, we must align education and workforce policy in a complementary manner and not as mutually exclusive.

With that perspective, the following are recommendations for this Committee to consider in order to address at least some aspects of our nation's education and workforce crisis.

1. Expand Pell Grants to cover short-term / workforce programs: The single most important step Congress can take in helping address our nation's skill shortage is to immediately authorize the use of Pell Grants for workforce programs. Students need the shortest and least expensive pathways to employment with opportunities for advancement throughout their lives.

In the last three years, our community colleges in Louisiana have graduated roughly 15,000 students from short-term workforce programs using state funds. The results have been astounding. First, students who complete these programs have very strong job placement rates (above 90 percent) and demonstrate wage improvements of 20 percent in their first year on the job (Glass, C., Strong Wage Gains from Short-term Credentials, Old Dominion University, Community College Leadership Research Report, Fall 2019).

More broadly in Louisiana, we have recognized an earnings premium for our students who complete short-term workforce programs that is greater than the initial earnings of students in traditional credit programs that are Pell Grant eligible. Clearly, these credentials are demonstrating value to employers.

Those shorter-term programs, with clear value in the market, are reserved for those who have money in their pocket and do not need to rely on a Pell Grant for their education. Effectively, we are limiting the ability for a broad swath of Americans to quickly gain the skills needed to obtain a good job.

Enacting the Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning (PELL) Act would be a profoundly important step toward addressing this current policy need. I congratulate

late you, Chairwoman Foxx, along with Representatives Stefanik, Banks, Hinson, and Thompson, for your vision in bringing forward this legislation, which RAMC has endorsed. I also appreciate the several other efforts in Congress to expand Pell Grants for short-term programs and strongly urge Congress to come to consensus on legislation that, when passed, will enable a significant increase in the number of students across the country who will have a new opportunity in how they improve their skills.

2. Update and Improve WIOA: Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Louisiana has 15 Workforce Development Areas, each with its own local Workforce Development Board (WDB) that is led by a representative of business and includes partners such as community colleges and local non-profits. These Boards collectively oversee 62 American Job Centers and numerous affiliate one-stop centers that provide entry for individuals seeking workforce and employment services, as well as related supportive services.

Collectively, in the program year ending last June, 5,655 adults (including dislocated workers) were served under WIOA in Louisiana, of whom 3,676 received “training” services (as defined under WIOA). [Note, this proportion of those in “training” is higher than the national average.] Across the two programs for adults and dislocated workers, roughly three quarters of participants were employed six months after exiting, and they had average quarterly earnings of \$6,697 and \$8,459 respectively. A vast majority of all participants left with a credential.

In 2021, to help address what had often been a disconnect between our colleges and WDBs, LCTCS led an effort to hold individual meetings with each WDB along with representatives from K12 education, economic development, corrections, children and family services, non-profits, and four-year colleges. We collectively developed a regional workforce ecosystem that continues under the leadership of our community colleges and is convened by our regional economic development organizations with regional employers. This work has helped us to build the human and programmatic infrastructure needed to meet our workforce needs.

However, despite these types of efforts, we must recognize that we will not meet the needs of those seeking to obtain skills or the needs of the business community by relying on the current WIOA system. In many ways, the program is simply stretched too thin in attempting to serve so many roles (convener, purveyor of labor market data, provider of career navigation assistance, and facilitator of supportive services, to name just a few). As such, the system is often not able to fully carry out what should be its central function of providing workforce development skills. In fact, in many places less than a quarter of WIOA funds are expended for actual workforce development.

In the past, this Committee has worked in a bipartisan fashion to update these programs, and I hope that you are able to again follow that path, because it is sorely needed. I believe the next reauthorization must, at a minimum, include these reforms:

- Require more funds to be targeted toward providing much-needed workforce development through what are identified as “Individual Training Accounts” under WIOA;

- Improve coordination with the Higher Education Act such as by providing incentives for one-stop operators to leverage Pell Grants—particularly Workforce Pell—so as to facilitate skill development opportunities to far more students;

- Maintain current provisions which require state and local boards to be led by business;

- Remove the current cap under WIOA on pay-for-performance models, allowing states and local workforce boards more flexibility in establishing enhanced accountability systems with providers;

- Provide better tools for states and localities related to labor market information so that individuals can be provided the most accurate and up-to-date information available on what jobs and skills are needed today—not yesterday; and

- Consider changes which would strengthen the role of community colleges in the overall WIOA workforce development system.

1. Focus on Students, Not Systems: We must establish a “no wrong door” approach to education and workforce that provides a clear path to education and skills attainment. Whether the journey begins as a high school honors graduate or as an adult basic education student, there must be a clear path to an education and the American Dream for everyone.

While our education and workforce systems are intended to lower or eliminate barriers to accessing education and employment, current policies too often place the highest barriers in front of those with the most need. For example, the processes for gaining workforce development services should not require so much information and bureaucracy. Congress should consider an effort, similar to the recent passage

of FAFSA simplification legislation, to make other education and workforce programs more accessible. When barriers win out, the impact is not only felt by the individual—we all pay the price when their abilities are sidelined and their potential contributions to our economy and our society go unrealized.

4. Leverage and Promote Employer Partnerships: Developing America's talent is a responsibility that education systems hold jointly with the business community. Employers need to be part of the solution, but they cannot solve this problem in isolation. In particular, small and mid-size businesses must be able to rely on the workforce and education systems to supply them with qualified workers who are ready to work.

The responsibility of any community college or workforce preparation program is to prepare students with the right skills needed to land a job. Knowing what those skills are can only be accomplished when there is active participation and cooperation with employers.

In Louisiana, we have many examples of innovative and highly productive partnerships with industry. In the northwestern part of our state, General Dynamics IT, or GDIT, is working with Bossier Parish Community College where the company employs about 1,000 employees on the premises of the college. GDIT is able to expand the pool of potential employees to include rural populations, which is vitally important in a time of workforce shortages, and our rural communities benefit from salaries in amounts almost unattainable previously to the residents of those small towns.

In the New Orleans area, our Mechatronics apprenticeship program, developed in conjunction with Greater New Orleans, Inc. or GNO Inc, our regional economic development partner, brings together three LCTCS colleges to meet the needs of three manufacturing businesses. Elmer Chocolate, Laitram, and Zatarain's identify promising employees, and each college teaches them a distinct set of skills to jointly prepare a highly sophisticated group of advanced manufacturing workers.

In Louisiana's Fifth Congressional District, partners like Ethridge Pipeline and Conduit, are working closely with Louisiana Delta Community College to develop the workforce needed to lay broadband across our state. The company has donated equipment, taught classes, identified equipment manufacturers, and brought them to the table. In a matter of weeks, our colleges have mobilized to create workforce development programs across the state to meet the workforce demands for one of our nation's strategic priorities.

Every single day, our colleges are working hand-in-hand with a wide array of industry partners to meet the most pressing workforce needs of our state. We have the data that reflect the need. It is our firsthand experience in the field, talking to business partners and to individuals who seek a better life, that gives me hope that we will meet the moment. First, we must have a strong policy platform that welcomes business partners to the table to help solve this challenge with us.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you today. We know that our people and our economies will be more resilient, dynamic, and future-ready if we can free ourselves from historical structures and reconceptualize higher education and workforce development for the modern world. I ask you to imagine each of your districts spread across this great land. Education is the antidote to nearly every single issue we face as a nation. Can you imagine an America where every single household has at least one college degree or high-value industry-based certification supporting that household? Together, we can build a better America for all our citizens. Thank you!

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. I now recognize Governor Polis and a former member of this committee as I have said, for his comments.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JARED POLIS, GOVERNOR OF
COLORADO**

Governor POLIS. Good morning. Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, well it is good to be under the watchful gaze of Chair Conyers and Chair Goodlatte, I hope you return to your Committee Room soon, and wish you luck. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the State of education.

Today our country truly does face an education crisis. A crisis in quality, equity, access, and affordability. As leaders, we need to do

what we can to strengthen our schools, create inclusive settings where all students can learn, empower our educators, parents, and school leaders to prepare every learner for success.

That starts with strong early childhood education. Colorado has made incredible progress with free, full day kindergarten for every child, and now a new free universal preschool, which launches this fall, which will save families \$6,000.00 per year, and prepare students for success.

While the pandemic brought forward significant challenges, we saw teachers, students, parents, school districts, higher ed, and businesses step up in new and innovative ways. We also saw major Federal investments from COVID relief funds provided through the Elementary and Secondary Educational Relief, or ESSR funds, and the Governor's Emergency Educational Relief or GEER funds, that are already making a difference.

In Colorado we used the lion's share of our ESSR funds to address learning loss, like starting the Colorado High Impact Tutoring Program, which offered 43,000 hours of tutoring to 3,800 students in its first semester. We have invested GEER money to create the Rise Education Fund, to invest in creative, locally driven solutions, to improve student achievement, and close achievement gaps in innovative ways, like the creation of a mobile learning center that brings resources, internet and learning opportunities directly to students in mountainous Lake County, Colorado.

We also created the Governor's Bright Spot Award, to recognize the 21 Colorado schools that improved student performance two bands or more, on our State accountability system since the pandemic began. Like Rocky Mountain Elementary School, and St. Vrain Valley School District that implemented high-quality hybrid learning, provided a no-cost summer program that offered evidence-based literacy and math instruction, and improved greatly results over the last 2 years.

We saw similar innovations across states like Indiana's Explore, Engage and Experience Grant Program that allows students to test out potential career pathways, and Washington's Reimagine Education Project, which integrates social emotional learning into alternative learning structures.

We are also focused on supporting the mental health needs of learners, including through critical mental health supports, like IMatter, an American Rescue Plan funded program that now offers six free counseling sessions to all students in Colorado.

We also continue to graduate more high school students with post-secondary credit, work skills and credentials. 53 percent of graduating Colorado students took a dual and concurrent enrollment course, and we want to grow that number. Colorado is also home to CareerWise, which now supports thousands of youth apprentices in not just Colorado, but Indiana, New York, DC, and Michigan.

By blurring the lines between high school and higher education, we can save students money, help them gain skills, and set them up to successfully navigate life. As we do that, we need to make higher education more affordable and accessible. In Colorado, we have held tuition rates lower than inflation for the last few years, and we launched the Zero Textbook Challenge, which encourages

Colorado institutions to expand the use of open educational resources, and eliminate textbook costs.

I also want to applaud the Biden administration's effort to increase Pell Grant funding. It is not only about affordability, but also about ensuring students get a real return on investment, holding schools accountable, and protecting students from predatory practices. We need transparency so students can make informed decisions about where to spend their hard-earned time and money.

All this work is to ensure that every student can get skills and knowledge to find a job that supports them and their family and meets the needs of our business community. In Colorado we have two open jobs for every unemployed person, which is why we are working to expanding training opportunities in new and innovative ways.

For instance, we are now providing free community and technical college for students pursuing careers in healthcare, with the hope of expanding this to construction, firefighting, law enforcement, nursing, and early childhood education. 1,000 students were trained and entered the workforce within the first 3 months of this program.

We are also in the process of expanding registered apprenticeship opportunities, and we created a first of its kind opportunity in the health center that integrates AmeriCorps and registered apprenticeships. I encourage Congress to reauthorize WIOA, so the states can continue directing key WIOA investments toward each state's unique, in demand workforce needs, including flexibility for key wraparound services like transportation and childcare, so people can get to work.

Through all this work, states are leading the charge on innovative ways to support students and workers of all ages. We need to be bold and continue pursuing new and innovative ways to prepare all Americans for success. Let us turn this crisis into action. Many states see this as an opportunity to move forward and innovate, and I am hopeful that Congress can use this momentum to improve quality, equity, access, and affordability across education. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Governor Polis follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. JARED POLIS, GOVERNOR OF COLORADO

Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Education & Workforce Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the State of Education.

I have spent much of my career in education, from launching and running charter schools and serving on the Colorado State Board of Education, to serving in Congress, including on this Committee, where I helped to reauthorize the broken No Child Left Behind Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, among others.

Today our country faces an education crisis. A crisis in quality, equity, in access, and affordability. As leaders, we must do what we can to strengthen our public schools, create inclusive settings where all students can learn, and empower our educators and school leaders to give students the best education possible to prepare every learner for success, and power our economy.

Early Childhood

That starts with a strong early childhood system. Colorado has made incredible progress with free, full-day kindergarten and our new free universal preschool program, which launches this fall, and will save families at least \$6,000 per year.

K12

We must also work to make historic investments in our public schools. While the pandemic brought forward significant challenges, we saw teachers, students, parents, school districts, higher education, and business step up in new and innovative ways.

We also saw unprecedented federal investments from COVID relief funds provided through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund and the Elementary and Secondary Education Relief (ESSER) Fund. These funds allowed Democratic and Republican Governors alike to get students back into classrooms as quickly and safely as possible.

In Colorado, we used the lion's share of our ESSER funds to address learning loss, like starting the Colorado High-Impact Tutoring program, which offered 43,000 hours of tutoring to 3,800 students in its first semester and is expanding this school year with the use of additional ESSER funds.

We have used GEER money to create the RISE education fund to invest in creative solutions to improve student learning, close equity gaps, and increase efficiency across the state, like the creation of a Mobile Learning Center housed in a repurposed school bus that brings resources, internet, and learning opportunities directly to students in mountainous Lake County, CO.

We also created the Governor's Bright Spot Award to recognize 21 schools that jumped two or more performance bands on our state accountability system since the pandemic began, like Rocky Mountain Elementary School in the St. Vrain Valley that implemented high-quality hybrid learning, and provided no-cost summer classes that offered evidence-based literacy and math instruction.

Last week I visited Chatfield Elementary School in Grand Junction, which improved three performance bands by focusing on professional development, aligning classroom work to academic standards, and providing additional support for struggling students.

We saw similar innovations across states, like Indiana's Explore, Engage, and Experience Grant that allows students to test out potential career pathways, and Washington's Reimagine Education Project, which integrates social emotional learning into alternative learning structures.

Now states are focused on improving student achievement, particularly around math, while creating safe and productive learning environments for every student, including major expansions to critical mental health support, like IMatter, an American Rescue Plan Act-funded program that offers six free counseling sessions to all students in Colorado.

We also continue to graduate more high school students with postsecondary credit, work skills, and credentials.

53% of Colorado students took a dual and concurrent enrollment course, and continued investments will help this number grow. Colorado is also home to CareerWise, which now supports thousands of youth apprentices in not just Colorado, but Indiana, New York, DC, and Michigan.

By blurring the lines between high school and higher education, we can save students money, help them gain skills, and set them up to better navigate postsecondary education.

Higher Education

As we do that, we must find ways to make higher education more accessible and affordable. The number of students pursuing postsecondary education is declining, and it is largely due to high costs. Bureau of Labor and Statistics data show that "between 2006 and 2016, the Consumer Price Index for tuition and fees increased 63%, compared to 21% for other goods and services"

That is why we have proposed a new scholarship to support any graduate in the class of 2024 who is pursuing postsecondary education, and launched the Zero Textbook Challenge, which encourages Colorado institutions to expand the use of open educational resources.

I also want to applaud the Biden Administration's efforts to pause student loan payments during the pandemic, provide widespread debt relief, and continue to increase Pell Grant funding.

It is not only about affordability, it is about ensuring students get a real return on investment, holding schools accountable, and protecting students from predatory practices.

We need full transparency so that students can make informed decisions about where to spend their hard-earned time and money.

Workforce

All of this work is to ensure that every student can get skills and knowledge to find a job that supports them and their family and meets the needs of our businesses.

In Colorado, we have two open jobs for every unemployed person, which is why we are working to expand training opportunities in new and innovative ways.

We are providing free community and technical college for students pursuing careers in health care, with the hope of expanding to construction, firefighting, law enforcement, nursing, and early childhood education. 1,000 students were trained and entered the workforce within the first 3 months of this program.

Similarly, Texas has set a goal for 60% of Texans ages 25–64 to earn industry-recognized credentials through their Credentials of Purpose and Value program.

We are also in the process of expanding registered apprenticeship opportunities, and have created a first-of-its-kind opportunity in the public health sector that fully integrates AmeriCorps and a Registered Apprenticeship.

I call on Congress to reauthorize WIOA so that states like Colorado can continue directing key WIOA investments towards its unique in-demand workforce needs, including key wraparound services.

Conclusion

Through all of this work, states are leading the charge on innovative ways to support students and workers of all ages.

The COVID pandemic exposed many of the cracks within our systems, showing us that we cannot rely on the old way of doing things. We have to be bold and continue pursuing new and innovative ways to prepare all Americans for success.

Let us turn this crisis into action.

Many states have seen this as an opportunity to move forward, and I am hopeful Congress can use this momentum to increase equity, quality, access, and affordability across education.

Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. Finally, we will hear from Mr. Pulsipher.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT PULSIPHER, PRESIDENT, WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY

Mr. PULSIPHER. Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee, I am grateful for your convening this hearing and for the opportunity to offer perspective on the State of higher education. WGU is a private, non-profit institution founded in 1997 by a bipartisan group of 19 Governors, who saw the opportunity to leverage technology and competency-based education to improve access, quality, and outcomes in higher education.

Our mission is to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity. Today we served more than 200,000 students and graduate 45 to 50,000 during an academic year. Two-thirds of who belong to one or more historically underserved populations. The challenges plaguing our higher education system are many and complex, to which our best response will be guided by the simple principle creating value for students.

This became abundantly clear when attending my first WGU commencement as graduates shared the journeys they took, and the hurdles they overcame to achieve their degrees. Many were in their 30's and often accompanied by both parents and children, reflecting upon this in the nearly 50 commencements since.

It is clear that for many, education is far more meaningful than a coming-of-age experience, or some external validation. It is a gateway to a better life for themselves and their families. That is the promise we all should expect of higher education.

This is not to diminish the role of research universities, nor imply that the purpose of higher education should be reduced to job training, nor is it to force tradeoff between advancing citizenry or career enablement, as both are fundamental for the well-being of well-functioning individuals and society.

I would argue that the challenges today center primarily around the growing failure to live up to education's promise as a great equalizer. Indeed, data show our most vulnerable students are disproportionately likely to leave college with considerable debt and no degree, or at least one that took far more than 4 years to earn.

Post-college earnings for low-income students are generally lower than those of their wealthier peers. Over the last 50 years, while completion for those from the top income quartile has increased from 40 to 62 percent, for their peers from the bottom income quartile it has barely risen. From the bottom income quartile it has barely risen from 6 to 13 percent.

We are leaving too much talent on the table and paying dearly for it, both in skyrocketing costs, and in persisting workforce gaps. Policymakers have worked to mitigate the risks that students experience from a poor return on investment. Instead of triaging a flawed system with well intentioned, but short-sighted solutions, we need to address the root problem. Higher education has been engineered beyond its primary objective, enabling economic and social mobility for its students.

Institutions contend with competing priorities, established budget mechanisms and conflicting incentives. It can favor selectivity, constraint enrollment, drive up costs, and propagate outdated models, layer in regulatory prescription and cultural nostalgia, and change becomes challenging to the point of impossible.

WGU was founded by design to better serve those poorly served, underserved, or not served at all by conventional options, with a focus on access and outcomes. 26 years later WGU has graduated more than 300,000 individuals who are employed at rates at or above national averages, with income gains one-third higher, who report higher levels of engagement in their jobs and in overall well-being.

Many aspects of WGU are unique, but our success in serving students may not be. Congress can promote greater clarity, purpose, and expectations in higher education, whereas much of current policy is left at highly regulated as to process, and unaccountable as to student outcomes. Safeguards are certainly needed, but safeguards that regulate inputs mostly reinforce convention and constraint innovation that holds the promise of enabling the very outcomes that safeguards intend to secure.

Congress can help flip this paradigm with an emphasis toward enabling innovation with accountability, particularly in access. Enabling the future workforce starts with dramatically expanding enrollment, and never before have we had such powerful tools as technology, the internet, and new models of learning, including competency-based education.

Relevancy—ensuring credentials and earned skills keep pace with the future work, and new credentials and pathways can be developed appropriately sized and timed to an individual's career development and workforce needs.

Costs and value—improving affordability by incentivizing lower costs and better choices, rather than how to pay for ever increasing costs, and holding institutions and students for credential attainment and value. Ultimately, outcomes are paramount, as access

without attainment is an empty promise, especially when underwritten by the taxpayer, and when students hold the debt.

Quality is not a matter of mode, method, or model, but completion and value for students. It is much a moral hazard to fund access without completion, as it is to achieve high completion rates by precluding access. With the proper incentives in place Congress can help reinvest a system that is accessible, affordable, completable, and relevant to opportunities and workforce needs.

Most importantly, we can dispel the disheartening claim repeated by far too many that college is not for me. Education is and must be for everyone, both for the sake of the individual and our whole society. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I now yield to the committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pulsipher follows:]

**Testimony of Scott Pulsipher
Western Governors University**

**Before the
House Education and the Workforce Committee**

February 8, 2023

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my views about the state of American higher education.

My name is Scott Pulsipher; I am a tech entrepreneur, the father of six children, and a deep believer in human potential. I have had the great honor of serving as the President of Western Governors University since April 2016. I came to leadership in higher education through a “nontraditional” path, finding success in a different industry that gave me the skills to succeed in the position I now occupy. WGU’s students have similarly followed a path that is increasingly typical but historically less traditional: rather than being driven to college by their parents immediately after graduating high school, they are paying their own way, working their own jobs, caring for their own children, and often carrying half a lifetime of experience and wisdom with them.

My views on higher education are not often shared by many leaders in academia whose entire careers have been shaped by working inside the system. My perspective is also not the same as those who seek to serve those traditional students for whom the system was built. Having spent most of my career in a high-growth area of the private sector, I have strong, well-informed views on how to design a higher education system that centers around the needs of students and articulates the needs of the workforce. The last seven years at WGU have also given me a deep perspective on all those who are not served, or who are poorly served, by traditional options in higher education—and most individuals fall into those categories. I sincerely hope that my testimony can help this committee to architect what our country so desperately needs: a higher education system that can connect a diverse population of inherently talented individuals with the opportunities of the 21st century, without bankrupting our students or taxpayers.

The State of Higher Education in America

As early as 1787, the Continental Congress noted that “knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” America’s postsecondary policy framework has evolved, establishing the precedent for public colleges in the Morrill Act in 1862, expanding access with the GI Bill after World War II, and passing the Higher Education Act in 1965.

Each of these advancements has been rooted in the [understanding](#) that expanding access to postsecondary credentials is critical for the United States to maintain a strong labor force, compete in the world economy, and unlock opportunities for its residents to lead rewarding lives. Particularly in today’s technology-driven knowledge economy, it has never been more important to provide America’s diversity of learners a pathway to opportunity. Congress has played a crucial role in driving important evolutions in our higher education system. While our goals may have remained the same, the progression of history and technology mean that the policies we need in order to achieve those goals

must evolve. We cannot let nostalgia impede progress, lest our actions propagate privilege rather than the American dream.

After all, higher education translates to better outcomes, on average, for those who achieve it, and over the long term, better-educated nations are healthier, wealthier, more innovative, and more stable. Those who are able to obtain a college degree earn on average [84% more per year](#) than those who do not, making them [47% more likely](#) to have health insurance, providing an expected [4 to 10 times more annual income during retirement](#), and ranking them consistently among those who report that their view of the [future is optimistic](#).

What Should Higher Education Deliver?

While debates around free speech, academic freedom, college athletics, and culture wars dominate headlines, it is important that leaders in higher education and our partners in government maintain a primary focus on what matters most.

First and foremost, the system should: 1) be accessible and traversable to all individuals, realizing the promise of this country that success should be open to all who are willing to pursue it; 2) create value for students and connect individuals with opportunity; and 3) by extension, be aligned to the needs of our economy, so that we have a strong match between the specific skills demanded by the labor market and the capabilities of our workforce, such that degree-holders are thriving economically and personally and so that our economy can grow.

These overarching objectives are core to our shared ideals as a nation and remain a bipartisan objective—one held not just by our elected leaders but by every parent and every person in this country. Yet sadly, it is increasingly evident that higher education has not yet lived up to its promise as a great equalizer and engine of economic and social mobility. Worse, there is an accelerating decline in the belief that college is accessible, affordable, complete-able, and relevant to the opportunities individuals want to pursue. There are few more disheartening claims than “college is not for me.”

Job 1: Higher Education Must Be Accessible, Traversable, and Equitable

There is no question that our system is leaving human potential on the table and is failing to serve as a catalyst for human progress. While many colleges and universities are innovating to create pathways to opportunity that are accessible to all, equity gaps stubbornly remain. According to the [Pell Institute](#), students who grow up in the lowest income quartile are nearly five times less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than those who grow up in the highest income quartile, and students of color are [three times less likely](#) to pursue a postsecondary credential since COVID-19. Data on postsecondary outcomes show our most vulnerable students are disproportionately likely to leave college with [considerable debt](#) and [no degree](#), or at best one that took [far more than four years](#) to earn; and [post-college earnings](#) for low-income students are generally lower than those of their wealthier peers. Those who do drop out will default on student loans at a rate [three times higher](#) than those who graduate.

Underlying the student loan crisis are sky-rocketing costs. Those that students face, in the form of tuition, have [increased](#) 180% since 1980 (adjusted for inflation). But much of the actual cost of college is paid for by various levels of government. Altogether, during the 2021 academic year alone, [U.S. degree-](#)

[granting postsecondary institutions spent \\$671 billion](#) (in constant 2020–21 dollars). That is [twice the OECD average](#), and yet our educational attainment among 25- to 34-year-olds [ranks only 13th](#).

For a privileged segment of the population, the current cost of pursuing higher education may indeed be worth it. But for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, traditional college options often present significant risks relative to their rewards. Today's graduates are no longer guaranteed the economic and social mobility enjoyed by previous generations. Recent college graduates are experiencing an unemployment rate [30% higher](#) than it was in 1997, and these individuals are now nearly [50% more likely](#) to live with their parents in their late 20s due to increasing debt loads. As a society, we must question a system with high costs and uneven, mediocre outcomes.

Indeed, belief in the [purpose of](#) and the potential of college is at an all-time low. Only [48% of Gen Z](#) high school students are considering college as an option, down 20% from May 2020. Since 2019, undergraduate enrollment has fallen [6.6%](#); given that high school graduates are expected to earn [75% less than if they had gone to college](#), this will culminate in a loss of \$3.6T to the U.S. economy over their lifetimes. Higher education has long been on an [unsustainable cost trajectory](#), and everyone—students, the government, and society—is bearing those costs.

Job 2: Higher Education Must Create Value for Students

The current state of higher education is perhaps best summarized by the Post-Secondary Value Commission, supported by the Gates Foundation and the Institute for Higher Education Policy. Their study found that nearly one-third of four-year institutions leave their students with [zero economic return](#) after accounting for the cost of attendance. It is sobering to reflect on the impact this has on all students but devastating to consider how this manifests for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who must navigate a buyer-beware system without a network of college-educated parents and friends to serve as guides.

A 2020–2021 [Strada-Gallup Education](#) poll of more than 20,000 Americans found that 79% cite the ability to support themselves and their family as very or extremely important in their decision for pursuing their highest level of education. As questions of cost continue to dominate the national discourse, we must remember that regardless of what students pay for a credential, we do them a great disservice if it does not unlock opportunities that translate into economic and social mobility.

Job 3: Higher Education Must Meet the Needs of the Workforce

As an extension of providing individuals a pathway to opportunity, a secondary benefit is realized: workforce needs become aligned with talent supply. The idea that higher education should be aligned to workforce needs is often dismissed by those within academia as ignorant of the “higher” virtues of education. My testimony is not meant to argue that we should do away with liberal arts degrees or live in a world without poets or artists. It is based in the reality that the world we *do* live in is desperately short of teachers, nurses, and other critical professions, and too many credentials aren't arming learners with the enduring and professional [skills](#) they need to succeed in the workforce.

Sadly, the gulf is wide: In a Gallup poll, 96% of Chief Academic Officers affirmed their programs were adequately preparing students for the workforce, a sentiment only 11% of employers shared. Unaddressed [skills gaps](#) are costing the U.S. economy \$13B per month.

Exacerbated during COVID-19 and only worsening since, the nursing talent shortage, for example, has led to years of walkouts and [27% turnover](#). With [80,000](#) applicants being turned away annually due to a lack of faculty, our education system is serving as a barrier between our nation’s talent and its needs, rather than as a bridge. At the same time, the U.S. is experiencing a teacher shortage, with [36,500 vacancies](#) across the country and another 163,500 positions being filled by teachers with less-than-required credentials. In a situation that self-perpetuates, these underprepared, early-career teachers are being dropped into [understaffed](#), difficult situations and end up leaving the profession, resulting in an increasing turnover rate. We are also seeing the scale of talent demand in cybersecurity rise: Currently, there are [700,000](#) unfilled positions, which is expected to rise to [3.5 million](#) in the coming months. Yet data produced by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that fewer than [100,000](#) students graduated with a degree in IT. These, and other pervasive workforce [shortages](#), are all products of a system of human capital development that is neither “just-in-time” nor “right-sized”.

The WGU Story

WGU is a nonprofit, online university, founded by a bipartisan group of 19 governors 26 years ago to address many of the challenges that continue to vex traditional higher education institutions today. Our founding governors recognized that many were not served well by traditional postsecondary options in their states, including those with some college but no degree, individuals from low-income backgrounds, students who are the first in their families to attend college, students of color, and/or residents of rural communities. WGU was built by states to complement and supplement state systems of higher education, to develop programs that closely align with employer needs, and to bring innovative, flexible, and accessible educational opportunities to individuals seeking a path to opportunity. Today, WGU is the nation’s largest university.

Our Students

WGU proudly serves a diverse student body of approximately 213,000 (FY21), located in nearly every county in all 50 states and at military installations overseas.¹ Last year we graduated more than [43,000 students](#) across four colleges: Business, IT, Education, and Health Professions. [Four out of five](#) WGU students work while enrolled; their [median age is 34](#). They come to us seeking a path to opportunity that can fit in their lives, that can meet them where they are, that allows them to leverage their experience and move quickly when possible, and that will enable them to thrive—financially and otherwise.

Our Model

Talent is universal. Access to opportunity is not. Work, family obligations, military deployments, financial constraints, lack of college readiness, mental and emotional barriers—these are just a few of the things that keep today’s would-be students from pursuing the credential that could benefit their careers, change their lives, and transform their families. With a mission to change lives for the better by creating pathways to opportunity, WGU was built to address these needs, through its affordable, online and on-demand competency-based learning model, workforce-relevant curriculum, and personalized, student-centric faculty support. Annual tuition and fees are [less than \\$8,000 per year](#), and our average cost for a bachelor’s degree is [less than \\$18,000](#)—relative to national average costs of well over [six figures](#). WGU

¹ For more about WGU, please see our annual report.

was created with the vision to be the most learner-centric university in the world. Powered by technology and a tradition of breaking tradition, our model is designed with the student at the center and optimized to deliver tangible value to each and every student, regardless of their circumstances.

Our Outcomes

In the absence of industry-standard accountability metrics, WGU dedicates its own dollars to annually surveying our alumni and the employers who hire our graduates. We will not rest until we know that we have created value for our students, for communities, and for the workforce, and we are innovating and testing ourselves constantly in order to improve.

Data from the [2021 annual Gallup Alumni Survey](#) show that most of our alumni complete their degrees in under two-and-a-half years, and after graduation they carry little debt and move into high-salaried roles. 74% of WGU graduates say their education was worth the cost, compared with 38% of bachelor's degree holders nationally. Money matters but is certainly not all of life nor the sole purpose of higher education. 77% of WGU alumni report they are thriving in their lives, and 44% are engaged in their jobs—both higher proportions than bachelor's degree holders nationally and U.S. adults without a postsecondary degree. The benefits of these outcomes also extend beyond individual alumni, generating billions of dollars for graduates' families and local economies.

Innovation & Accountability: A Framework for Reinvigorating Higher Education's Promise

WGU is unique, but our success in serving students need not be. Our story simply demonstrates what is possible when an institution makes innovation core to its culture and holds itself accountable for delivering strong outcomes. Indeed, many other institutions are delivering incredible outcomes on behalf of students with founding stories and delivery models that look different from ours. Unfortunately, these bright spots are the exception rather than the rule.

To reinvigorate higher education's promise, we need to embrace new models that have the potential to serve students better and be brave enough to depart from traditional models that do not serve students well. Innovations in learning models, college readiness, financial aid and college funding, faculty and student support models, pedagogy and learning methods, assessment, and every other component of education are needed; and data-driven learning science must be part of every institution's business model.

But instead of creating a regulatory framework that enables innovation, the current policy approach to higher education leaves the industry highly regulated as to process and unaccountable to students as to outcomes. Safeguards are certainly needed—innovation without accountability is just a bad idea. But safeguards that regulate inputs often reinforce outdated delivery models and restrict innovation that holds the promise of enabling the very outcomes safeguards intend to secure.

Enabling innovation while ensuring accountability will first require clarity on outcomes. Institutional missions may vary in terms of the specific populations served and what programs institutions provide, but Congress should hold *every* college and university accountable to achieving the following outcomes, while eliminating distractions and constraints that impede innovation:

1. **Improved completion rates:** Some college, no degree often leaves learners worse off than they were previously.
2. **A strong return on investment:** Affordability matters, but it means little to graduates if the credentials they earn aren't aligned with the future needs of our economy and don't lead to high-quality jobs.
3. **Equity in both access and attainment:** Pathways to opportunity must be accessible to all.

Enhanced data on student outcomes is necessary to enable greater transparency and accountability. The current college reporting system is [burdensome on institutions, yet provides little practical information for students and families](#) due to significant gaps in college data reporting. Congress should continue to advance endeavors that increase the accuracy, clarity, and transparency necessary to inform student choice and enable accountability at the institution and program level.

With outcomes clarified and data on those outcomes collected, Congress should reinforce accountability mechanisms that have historically lacked focus on outcomes. Accreditation, for example, has [long been recognized](#) as in need of "transformation," given, among other shortcomings, the lack of focus on student outcomes. Congress should consider more effectively utilizing accreditors to capture and monitor both institutions' goals and progress against those goals for student success and outcomes, thus improving alignment with societal objectives for education that are effectively underwritten by federal student aid and taxpayer dollars. In addition to safeguarding federal dollars, the shift from defining quality based on inputs to outcomes would foster and support innovation necessary to better meet the needs of today's learners and the future workforce.

Guideposts for Delivering Value

Shifting the policy approach to regulate outcomes should help institutions determine which activities to prioritize without imposing restrictions on *how* colleges and universities deliver value. At WGU, we have shown that the following activities are critical for achieving these desired outcomes: expanding access, improving the relevancy of credentials, personalizing the learning journey to increase the probability each individual succeeds, and lowering costs. It's up to Congress to create proper incentives for institutions to innovate along these mutually reinforcing dimensions, which together will ensure our higher education as a whole delivers greater value to learners and society.

Policymakers should also consider the unintended consequences of policies that may in fact disincentivize colleges and universities from pursuing innovations that enhance value. For example, loan cancellation² efforts may reduce some of the risk students face from experiencing a low return from their investment, but this does nothing to motivate institutions to deliver higher-quality credentials with greater workforce alignment. Indeed, it risks a situation whereby taxpayers lose, [institutions gain](#), and students are left with a credential of little value and an income too low to thrive on—certainly not the goal of either public or individual investments in education.

² It is also worth mentioning how policies like this can create a "[moral hazard](#)" for students. With the knowledge that individuals may not need to face the full cost of their education thanks to Income-Driven Repayment plans, for instance, students may elect to borrow more.

1. Expand Access

Reinventing higher education starts with reimagining access. Today the [majority of learners](#) are part of a diverse group of individuals who share one thing in common: they are typically excluded in both existing and new program design. Often over age 22, who work at least part-time, likely pay for school independently, have limited discretionary budgets, or live in education deserts³, these individuals aren't looking for a coming-of-age experience but rather a path to economic prosperity, with the flexibility to learn on their schedule.

As WGU and others have demonstrated, online learning has the potential to dramatically expand access to meet the needs of today's learners. [64% of our students](#) are from one or more of the following underserved populations: students who are the first in their family to attend college, students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, active-duty or veteran military service members and their families, and/or residents of rural communities. To date, we have graduated more than [300,000 students](#)—and we're far from done.

However, despite years of research documenting the potential benefits of online learning and [surveys](#) consistently showing that most students would like to take online courses in the future, policies continue to define quality based on learning modality, constraining the potential of tech-enabled learning to dramatically expand access. Perhaps it is time for a Morrill Act for the digital age. If enabling access in the 19th century demanded land, enabling access in the 21st demands the provision of resources to leverage technology to meet the needs of today's learners.

Reimagining access also means acknowledging that learning is no longer a one-and-done journey with graduation as the end goal. Higher education must be an accessible tool to upskill and reskill throughout an individual's life. It must serve as an investment that propels learners forward to completed credentials and new opportunities.

Specific policy recommendations with examples of relevant innovations are included in the Appendix.

2. Improve the Relevancy of Credentials

To ensure students derive real value from their credentials, institutions must be held accountable for designing programs and learning outcomes that are aligned with the rapidly changing opportunities of our future economy. At WGU, for instance, we offer only degree programs and industry certifications that can lead to in-demand careers, drawing on a large volume of data that points to where the workforce is going and which skills are needed for specific roles. We then validate these findings with our advisory councils and work with domain experts in the field to help us design our curriculum, associating those skills with high-value, assessable workforce competencies.

WGU confirms that students are competent through our high-quality assessment program, so employers can confidently trust that WGU students are able to perform the skills and competencies that we claim they can. We are also partnering with other stakeholders to build a common language around skills so educators, employers, and job seekers all mean the same thing when communicating through job listings and course descriptions.

³ A study published in 2018 estimated that more than 41 million adults, or 17.6 of the adult population, "live more than 25 miles from a broad-access public university."

WGU does these things to ensure students derive real value from their credentials. The process of creating value is not simple: It involves everything institutions do to help students succeed academically, progress toward completion, design programs that align to workforce needs, and equip students with the skills to thrive in their chosen industries and to have resilience as those industries change over time. These institutional design decisions are unique to each institution, to the population of students they serve and the needs of those students, and to the specific programs that institutions offer. But despite this diversity, there are tangible policy levers that can enable innovation towards these ends and incentivize institutions to prioritize value and credential relevancy.

Specific policy recommendations with examples of relevant innovations are included in the Appendix.

3. Lower Costs

The crippling level of student debt in this country is the symptom of a larger problem: Too many learning experiences are not designed to be affordable. While there is a role for government subsidy, institutions must be incentivized to address the underlying factors that are contributing to this cost crisis. Policies that enable innovation and hold institutions accountable for maintaining or lowering costs can help. Costs can be shifted (e.g., from student to taxpayer), but they still exist—rather than focus on who should pay, Congress must use its power to make higher education more affordable.

WGU and others have shown it's possible. To keep tuition low, WGU aggressively controls costs and focuses marginal spending on investments that can contribute positively toward student outcomes. Whereas private nonprofit and public schools on average devote just less than one-third of their spending on course delivery and instruction, we devote roughly 60% (inclusive of our investment in teaching and learning technology). The university also employs a unique tuition model that recognizes how constraints around cost and time intersect. WGU allows students to take as many courses as they would like over a six-month period for one flat fee.

It is worth noting that there is no incentive through accreditation, the Higher Education Act, the Department of Education, or any other governmental entity for institutions to keep costs low. If WGU were to double its tuition tomorrow, our students would simply borrow more from the federal government and carry more debt throughout their lives. WGU would have twice as much money and would quickly find ways to spend it—as do institutions whose tuition is seven times ours. There is no trophy for doing what WGU has done; in fact, the Inspector General for the Department of Education audited WGU and in 2017, suggested WGU repay over \$700 million in federal aid to the government. This suggestion was more fully reviewed by the Department and subsequently dismissed. However, in its audit, the OIG noted that “whether the school’s model was improving educational quality or expanding access to higher education” was irrelevant to their findings. Understanding that the Department’s audit standard is federal law, the auditor’s statement makes clear that our current law has little priority on costs and outcomes and is instead focused on controlling “inputs.”

Specific policy recommendations with examples of relevant innovations are included in the Appendix.

Conclusion

Despite good intentions, our nation's higher education system is failing to keep up with the varying needs of America's diversity of learners and leaving untapped potential on the table. There's no doubt that colleges and universities face innumerable constraints that propagate the status quo and make innovation challenging—regulatory prescriptions, competing priorities, and antiquated notions of how best to serve students are just a few. But WGU and others are demonstrating what is possible when an institution is clear about its purpose and singularly focused on delivering value to students.

By centering policy on enabling innovation while ensuring accountability for outcomes, Congress can provide clarity of purpose and direction for the system. Policies that enable access, incentivize institutions to improve the relevancy of credentials, and focus on reducing costs can build out an education system that makes opportunity work for everyone.

At WGU we believe in the inherent worth and ability of every individual and unapologetically advocate for the transformational changes needed to reinvigorate the promise of education as the surest pathway to opportunity. We want every learner—not just every WGU student—to succeed. To that end, we are committed to partnering with Congress and other higher education institutions to remove the barriers that keep learners from achieving their dreams. Together, we can empower this generation and future generations to tap into their potential and make our nation stronger than ever.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to testify before you today. I welcome any questions you may have.

Appendix: Specific Policy Levers

1. Expand Access

Policy Lever 1A: Reduce Friction towards Tech-Enabled Learning

Tech-enabled learning has the potential to dramatically expand access and improve outcomes. Whether at fully online universities or brick-and-mortar campuses, both the substance of learning and the delivery method can be improved by leveraging technology. Tech-enabled learning empowers faculty to enhance the quality of their courses and tailor to their students' unique needs. Readily available data on how students are engaging with learning resources also enables faculty to adapt and personalize learning materials and experiences through timely, relevant interventions. All learners can benefit from online learning, but especially working learners and rural learners for whom online learning may be the only option that will fit in their lives.

It is important to understand, however, that neither online, nor in-person, nor hybrid, nor experiential learning is inherently of higher or lower quality; deliberate design is what ultimately matters. Customers do not shop at Amazon because the retailer is online; they do so because of its vast selection and availability, because it is convenient and trusted, or because shopping there affords some other benefit that's lacking elsewhere. It is how the retailer employs the technology through deliberate design that creates a valuable customer experience. The same is true in higher education—it is how institutions use the tools available to them to make learning more personalized, flexible, relevant, and ultimately valuable that matters, and it is along those dimensions that we should be assessing our nation's colleges and universities.

With that in mind, [policies](#) should no longer define quality based on learning modality, instead following the lead of the recently proposed PELL Act (HR 496), which defines quality based on outcome measures that matter. Congress should also identify opportunities to eliminate the disparity of treatment based solely on the academic delivery model. For example, since its inception in 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has supported Veterans in their pursuit of higher education. This support has included tuition, fees and housing support. However, the [military housing allowance \(MHA\)](#) levels are currently reduced by half for students taking distance education courses compared to students taking in-residence courses. There is no support to justify this disparate treatment between those taking in-residence courses and those taking distance education courses, and, as such, the difference in MHA should be eliminated.

Policy Lever 1B: Enhance Transparency and Accountability for Credit Transfer

Outdated credit transfer policies and practices can create unnecessary barriers to access. Of the 2.9 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2019, a projected [1.1 million](#), or 38%, will transfer to another institution within six years. While these students should be able to apply most, if not all, of their prior credits at a transfer institution, the reality is far more complicated. A GAO report estimates that transfer students lose about [40% of their earned credits](#). Students can incur additional costs and debt recovering these lost credits.

Congress can implement policies that improve the transfer process by increasing transparency and holding institutions more accountable. Leveraging existing data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Congress could require the creation of an online credit portal, where

transfer data for all institutions, programs, and courses can be accessed by current and future students. Institutions receiving Title IV funds would be required to participate, and those where students frequently lose transfer credits would be penalized.

Policy Lever 1C: Embrace Innovation in Credential Design

While it is estimated that [two-thirds of jobs](#) require postsecondary education, not all of that education must take the form of a degree. But degree-denominated learning [dominates](#) our investments in education, leaving our nation underinvested in non-degree credentialing opportunities. There is a growing [demand for high-quality skills education](#) and certification programs that offer the flexibility and relevance for students and employees and the learning outcomes valued by employers who are doing the hiring. Federal Pell Grants could be leveraged as a transformative tool in connecting individuals from low-income backgrounds with the millions of unfilled jobs across the country. However, current restrictions on the use of federal Pell Grants do not allow shorter-term credentials to qualify.

As is the case with degree programs, there is variation in terms of the value provided by short-term programs. To ensure that federal funding is targeted to short-term credentials of value, Congress should provide quality guardrails based on program outcomes as opposed to proscribing inputs or discriminating as to provider type. The Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning (PELL) Act, recently introduced by members of this committee, proposes outcomes-based eligibility criteria, including completion rates and a positive return on investment metric.

Policy Lever 1D: Deliver Student Aid through Lifetime Learning Accounts

To enable student aid to align with a broader range of credential pursuits, Congress should deliver student aid—grants, scholarships, and loans—through a new system of Lifetime Learning Accounts. Individuals could use the funds in their personal Lifetime Learning Account for a wide range of higher learning, including coding boot camps, badges, credentials, and other relatively short education opportunities, so long as the provider is accredited by a quality assurance entity. Lifetime Learning Accounts would be tax-free accounts, similar to Health Savings Accounts, which every American would have and could use for education, study, or coursework at any eligible provider of higher learning. For each individual, the account would serve as the depository of funds from a wide range of sources, including grants (e.g., Pell Grants, grants from other sources, Forever GI Bill Veterans Benefits, and military and employer tuition assistance) and loans, from both governmental and private sources. The funds would belong to the individual, would grow at a tax-free rate, and could be rolled over to other family members, thereby encouraging cost-conscious use of the funds.

2. Improve the Relevancy of Credentials

Policy Lever 2A: Improve Transparency on Value to Enable Informed Choice

Just as students need clarity on costs, they also should have clarity on the value they can expect in return for earning a credential. There is a substantial amount of variation among programs and institutions in terms of the value provided to students. And yet, information on the wide variation in value among programs and institutions is not made readily available to students. While the College Scorecard provides data on costs, as well as median earnings and median debt by program of study, the information is difficult for an individual to translate into a return-on-investment metric. This makes it harder for individuals to identify high-value programs and institutions that could have a transformative

impact on their lives and that of their families. At worst, it leaves students vulnerable to scams and predatory institutions.

The focus of accountability policies at the federal level has generally been limited to the low end of that distribution, aimed at protecting students from the negative consequences of enrolling in low-financial-value programs. While that is an important place to start, Congress should take action to incentivize a broader set of institutions to orient to value. Congress could require that ROI metrics for programs and institutions be published in the College Scorecard or similar transparency tool. Similar to providing transparency on cost, this information should be made readily available to students at relevant points-of-entry, like the FAFSA.

Policy Lever 2B: Accountability for Value

Transparency is a powerful tool, serving to orient institutions to value; however, it is insufficient to prevent taxpayer subsidization of programs that leave students with zero economic return after accounting for the cost of attendance. In addition to cutting off financial aid eligibility for such programs, through enforcement of provisions such as [gainful employment](#), Congress should require institutions to have “skin-in-the-game” when it comes to the loans they expect their students to take out. If their graduates are unable to repay, the financial burden should not fall squarely on taxpayers. Ensuring all providers of higher education have a financial stake in their students’ success will go a long way to align the incentives of institutions more closely with the outcomes that students and taxpayers care about – namely, degree completion and employment attainment.

Policy Lever 2C: Support the Development of LER Technology

The skills students accumulate through their education or work experience mean little without a way to talk about them and a mechanism to verify them. Learning and Employment Records (LERs) give individuals ownership of their verified skills and credential attainment, allowing them to seamlessly share their know-how and can-do with prospective employers and academic institutions.

LERs take in data from learning and work and translate between those two worlds, providing a comprehensive view of the human capital individuals possess and which additional skills and learning achievements are needed for new roles. Crucially, in an era of massive economic displacement, they can help individuals who must or want to change industries understand how their skills translate in entirely new contexts.

In recent years, WGU partnered with other members of the White House’s American Workforce Policy Advisory Board, including IBM, Salesforce, and Walmart, to run multiple pilots to build out the feasibility of LERs. Those successful pilots represented an unprecedented collaboration among the government, higher education, and the workforce.

Policymakers should continue to collaborate with educators and business leaders to create a standard definition of skills and participate in funding, building, and adopting the infrastructure for the future of work. In addition, Congress should use its broad reach to facilitate and incentivize skills adoption across the various sectors of the learning and working landscape.

Policy Lever 2D: Authorize and Promote Competency-Based Education (CBE)

CBE is a powerful tool to increase credential relevancy and value because alignment with workforce needs is baked into the design. The hallmark of CBE are the competencies—the clearly defined skills and knowledge that students will master—which are aligned with the skills and knowledge students will need in the workforce. WGU strongly advocates Congress’s full recognition of CBE in federal policy frameworks so that all interested institutions of higher learning can pursue a method that allows for a more student-centric focus. In part due to its role in enhancing the student experience through personalization and flexibility, CBE has a long, proven record of achieving excellent outcomes for students. Permanent recognition of CBE in the statute can incentivize and accelerate the use of this student-centered instruction methodology in higher education. The ultimate result will be more educational offerings closely aligned with student and workforce needs.

The flexibility of CBE means that it is frequently misunderstood and disadvantaged by outdated laws and institutional practices that focus on time instead of learning. For example, financial aid is often tied to credit hours, such as requirements about the number of credit hours a student must be enrolled in to maintain aid, and it may have requirements about the pace at which a learner must progress. CBE is intentionally designed without a set calendar for progression and does not fit the outdated financial aid model. Today’s broadband technology also gives students access to high-quality, affordable CBE no matter where they live or their life circumstances.

Policy Lever 2E: Round out How We Measure Success

Not all value is economic: WGU is also invested in seeing our graduates thriving and engaged. WGU has partnered with Gallup to track and report these metrics, which provide a more holistic picture of the value we are providing to students beyond financial return and completion. Orienting to student voice is key to student-centered design; measuring and tracking student and alumni experiential data can serve as a key data point informing efforts to improve relevancy of credentials. Congress should require institutions to collect and report student and alumni experiential data, including student and alumni wellbeing, whether students would recommend the program to others (Net Promoter Scores), and graduates’ feelings of preparedness for the real world. While collecting these data would represent a significant new reporting requirement, the impact could be transformative. Orienting to customer voice and satisfaction through tracking and reporting experiential data has transformed the way businesses think about value and deliver services and it has the potential to do the same in higher education. The most significant cost would be borne by those not already gathering student satisfaction data; however, it could be argued that gathering student satisfaction data should be standard practice for colleges and universities.

3. Lower Costs

Policy Lever 3A: Turn off the Spigot of Unlimited Loan Eligibility

Congress should cap or eliminate Parent PLUS and Grad PLUS Loans and allow for more flexibility in borrowing at the undergraduate and graduate level. For example, Congress could allow for more variation in borrowing amounts based on the economic returns of a credential. Without loan limits, institutions have no incentive to hold down expenses when students and families can borrow up to the full cost of attendance with very little creditworthiness test. Parents of dependent students are saddled with enormous debt without the personal benefit of wage gains from higher learning for themselves, paying off their children’s education debt instead of saving for retirement. Unscrupulous institutions, regardless of tax status, can price their postbaccalaureate degrees much higher than actual cost because

graduate students have no limits on borrowing, resulting in little to no return on investment for many graduate program students.

Policy Lever 3B: Stop Paying for Time; Start Paying for Learning

Quality assurance mechanisms tied to institutional eligibility for federal student aid are centered on time-based measures, including the credit hour, full-time faculty, and number of hours of instruction. Such prescriptions can create barriers to adoption of innovations that could lower costs and better meet students' needs, including competency-based education and leveraging technology in design and delivery. Congress should create alternative measures to the credit hour focused on evidence of student learning—what students actually know and can do. Legislation to enshrine competency-based education in law—instead of continuing to regulate it as an experiment—has come before Congress for over a decade, most recently in the CBE Act of 2022 (H.R. 7461). This type of legislation is essential to expand proven innovation that can drive down costs for students and focus institutions on equipping students with workforce aligned skills.

Policy Lever 3C: Improve Transparency on Costs to Enable Informed Choice

For many students, investing in their education is the biggest financial decision of their lives. There is no reason for students to be making that decision based on false indicators like US News and World Report—we can give them better data. Congress has already taken a critical step to address these efforts by introducing legislation such as the College Cost Transparency and Student Protection Act (H.R. 9429). In addition, transparency tools like the Department of Education's College Scorecard are a great starting point. The key is providing students access to such information at *points of entry* into the financial decision-making process.

These critical points of entry include the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and financial aid offer letters sent to students directly by institutions. Congress could require that transparency tools like the College Scorecard be embedded within the FAFSA. This would enable students to use the comparison tool to review student outcomes for each of the colleges they list on the FAFSA and help them make an informed decision when considering the college financial aid offer.⁴

These offers are used by students and families to make key education and financial decisions. Unfortunately, a recent [GAO report](#) found that most colleges are not following best practices for providing clear and standard information in their financial aid offers. According to GAO's review of offers from a nationally representative sample of colleges, nearly two-thirds of colleges follow half or fewer of the 10 best practices. For example, according to best practices, a college should estimate the net price—how much a student will need to pay to attend that college—by deducting only grants and scholarships from all key costs. However, GAO found that an estimated 91% of colleges do not include or understate the net price in their aid offers. GAO recommended that Congress consider legislation requiring colleges to provide students financial aid offers that follow best practices for providing clear and standard information.

⁴ Transparency on costs should be paired with transparency on time-to-graduation and completion rates to enable students to make more realistic estimates. Students are likely budgeting four years of costs while a more typical pathway to graduation may take five or six. Nontraditional students take seven years to graduate on average.

Policy Lever 3D: Improve Transparency on the Implications of Borrowing

Policymakers and institutions can help learners understand both the cost of their education and their return on their investment through financial literacy and responsible borrowing policies. WGU's [Responsible Borrowing Initiative](#), for instance, demonstrates the power of transparency. All students who apply for financial aid receive a personalized Financial Aid Plan, which recommends that students borrow only their "unmet direct costs"—tuition and fees minus any grants or scholarships. The personalized plan includes information about the total cost of attending WGU, their estimated monthly student loan payment after graduation, as well as links to financial aid tools and other useful resources. Since 2013, the average debt at graduation has decreased by more than 30%. Currently 65% of borrowers accept the recommendation to borrow less, and another 10% decline loans altogether. By simply providing useful information at the point in time when deciding how to pay for college, WGU is able to significantly change student behavior and reduce unnecessary borrowing.

Chairwoman FOXX. Again, thank you all very much for your very enlightening comments. Under Committee Rule 9(a) we will now question witnesses under the 5-minute rule. I will wait to ask my questions, and therefore recognize Mr. Wilson from South Carolina for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and best wishes on your service as Chairwoman.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. We are just so happy to have you. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. It is especially good to see an alumnus of college, Governor Polis, although he is going to be in a way violating union work rules with a big smile he has that indicates he is happy to be here, but he cannot wait to get home, and so best wishes on your service.

Mrs. GENTLES, you have cited what is going right in American education. You call Arizona the gold standard for education and freedom as the passage of the Universal School Choice Bill last year. Can you explain how the law works, and how you consider it the gold standard?

Mrs. GENTLES. Yes. Arizona has had a program called Empowerment Scholarship Accounts in place for over 10 years, and these provide State created savings accounts that can be used for eligible education purposes for K-12. These can be tuition, but also tutoring, therapies, textbooks, and if the funds are left over they can be even rolled over and used for college.

The program was expanded for universal eligibility, setting a model for other education savings accounts in the country. There are over 10 states with these programs now, and we think that this is the future because it offers control, freedom, and flexibility for parents.

Mr. WILSON. Well, it is really a great model for the rest of the country. Congratulations. Dr. Sullivan, you discussed how the rapid developments of technology and increasing skills demands in the modern workforce. I am really grateful in my home State of South Carolina. We have been promoting technology. It has resulted in my hometown of Lexington, South Carolina, the largest Michelin tire company corporation investment in the world.

Additionally, it has led to our State now being the leading manufacturer exporter of tires. Then with success in our State, with Governor Carroll Campbell of BMW, we are now the leading with Volvo and Mercedes plants now, we are the leading export of cars, but it is due to the technology and the technical schools that we have that made this possible.

With the development of the workforce development system, it has to evolve. How can the workforce system better embrace technological innovations to increase efficiency and improve the services available to job seekers?

Mr. SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Wilson, and congratulations to South Carolina on the incredible, great work that you have done. We have been on the other end of some of those competitions that you have won, and we are very proud to see the progress going on in South Carolina, and great work by your community and technical college system there to make sure that the State of South

Carolina has the workforce talent that they need in order to be able to support those businesses once they arrive.

It is important to note that I mentioned 60 million adults in this economy with a high school diploma or less. Each year in the State of Louisiana we graduate about 40,000 kids from high school a year, yet we have 1.1 million working age adults who have a high school diploma or less. Oftentimes, they are the same parents to the young people that we were just describing.

From our perspective, we must build in continuous opportunities for on ramp and for individuals to get into education, short-term training to get the education that they need to be able to take on that first job, but then also a great relationship with the employers, like the ones that you mentioned, to help advance the education of that individual so they understand the technology.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much. Hey, we enjoy the competition with you, but it is not fair when you bring people to Mardi Gras season, it has an unfair advantage. Mr. Pulsipher, you were going through the Western Governor's University's responsible borrowing initiative. Can you go through even further, how does this benefit students?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Yes. Thank you for that question Representative Wilson. The responsible party initiative is simply based upon the principle that if you give information—if you give better information to individuals, they make better choices. What we do is we actually expose to our individuals what the total cost of attending and completing their degree will be at WGU and make recommendations to them as to how much they should borrow.

What we have actually found is that, you know, if only two-thirds of the students actually follow that recommendation, and another 5 to 10 percent end up actually choosing no Federal aid whatsoever. What that has allowed WGU graduates to achieve is that we have reduced the borrowing by 30 percent in terms of debt per graduate. It has declined by 30 percent since the Responsible Borrowing Initiative, and we have actually also reduced the total number of students who are attending WGU, and their actual use of financial aid to do so.

Mr. WILSON. Well, thank each of you for coming, and again, Governor, we are happy to have you here. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Now I recognize Ms. Wilson for the purpose of questioning the witnesses.

Ms. WILSON. Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott, for convening today's hearing. Last night during his State of the Union address President Biden said let us give public school teachers a raise. They deserve a raise. Everyone in the chamber gave a standing ovation. Everyone on both sides. I could not agree more.

Later today, I am introducing a bill with Mr. Bowman, and with the vast majority of the Democrats on this committee to do just that, the American Teacher Act. The American Teacher Act sets a \$60,000.00 minimum teacher's salary nationwide and provides a cost of living adjustment for teachers making above \$60,000.00.

Low teacher pay is one of the many factors contributing to teacher shortages across the Nation. Chairwoman Foxx got it right, our education system is in fact in crisis. We have thousands of

unstaffed classrooms, partly because of low teacher wages. As a former Miami-Dade County teacher, principal, and school board member, promoting the vitality of our Nation's education system is my top priority.

I see the struggle to recover from COVID-19 pandemic in my community every day, from elementary school classrooms to college lecture halls, that is why Democrats put a plan forward to help our schools during the 117th Congress. In Miami-Dade County public schools, even with Federal support, officials are still grappling with teacher shortages amidst a growing migrant population in the region.

A recent report from Broward County schools revealed a disturbing increase in behavioral incidents connected to COVID related trauma and stress. Despite these challenges, my Republican colleagues have decided to weaponize their newfound majority to politicize American education.

Proposed Republican reforms, including the Parents Bill of Rights, are nothing more than political posturing. These proposals are nothing more than an appeal to the most radical sectors of our Nation. They fail to address the needs of students and staff across the education spectrum, leaving them ill-equipped and under-prepared for a post pandemic economy.

The democratic members of this committee are here to continue the work we started in the 117th Congress, with one goal in mind—strengthen our education system. Remember, this is only the beginning. Democrats will stay the course. We will fight this right-wing extremist agenda. Our amazing students, teachers, college professors, school personnel and parents deserve nothing less.

With that, I have a few questions. Welcome back Governor Polis. I sat next to you on this committee. You said in your testimony that we are in a crisis of equity and access to higher education, and I agree. A large component of that is cost. The cost of a higher education degree has skyrocketed, and students have become saddled with debt.

I am pleased that the Biden administration has taken significant efforts to address this crisis, including one-time debt relief, changes to the income driven repayment program, and changes to public service loan forgiveness programs. Unfortunately, my colleagues have slammed these efforts as a back door scheme from the Democrats. I believe these are necessary to fix a broken long system.

Why are these administrative actions necessary for borrowers, and what can Congress do to build on the administration's work to address some of the biggest issues with the loan system?

Governor POLIS. Thank you, Representative Wilson. The cost of a college education has rendered it less accessible now, rather than more accessible for many Americans. It has increased at a higher rate than inflation for much of the last several decades. We are grateful for Federal programs that are able to help students meet the costs and break down those barriers.

Those include Pell Grants, and I am very supportive of the Biden administration's efforts to increase Pell Grants, as well as efforts to support innovation and excellence. This work of making sure that we align investment to outcomes, and making sure that students receive value for the education they get is also important.

It is important to look at the cost, and at the same time to look at the benefit, and make sure that any investments that the Federal Government is making, as well as we're doing this in Colorado with our State investments, make sure that the benefits exceed the costs of the investment that we are making and helping the students achieve success.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. I now recognize Mr. Walberg from Michigan for 5 minutes.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the panel for being here, including our colleague who is still our colleague, just on a different committee. One of the biggest drivers of the cost of higher education is the fact that graduate students have no limit on borrowing.

Studies show many master's degrees do not have an equal return on investment. In fact, one study found approximately 40 percent provided a negative return on investment. Mr. Pulsipher, you mentioned in your testimony that your institution has focused on delivering a valuable education to its students, by focusing on degrees and certifications that lead to in demand careers. That is interesting—while keeping costs low for students. That is interesting as well.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on how you create these programs, specifically, while keeping the costs low?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Yes. Thank you for that question Representative Walberg. We start with the fundamental principle that education has to be a path to opportunity. We start from that opportunity and work backward if you will. We directly identify those skills and requirements that are needed in the workforce, particularly the future workforce.

That can come from partnerships with a company called Light Cast. You can do a great library and catalogue of all the skills that are needed. Once we identify kind of macro demand out there, we then start working directly with employers and associations that represent that topical, or kind of that field of study and domain of expertise, such that we are gaining that input directly into the design and development of our curriculum so that we know that fundamentally that when our students complete those programs, that they're actually ready, and possess the skills and competencies that are needed to be successful in the workforce.

This is why 98 percent of our employers are hiring WGU graduates again, and they rate them as highly skilled, or highly prepared for the workforce, as do the students and graduates themselves. As it relates to making it affordable, we have something that addresses both the tuition and the cost of completing a program, but also can accelerate the time to complete it.

We simply want first and foremost, to keep our tuition costs at under \$4,000.00 for a bachelor's degree per a 6-month term, not for the competency based approach, it actually allows individuals to go at a pace that is right for them, such that in 6 months students can complete as many courses as they are able. We do not track seat time in the course.

What we track is competence to that, such that on average our bachelor's degrees—our graduates of bachelor's degrees are com-

pleting in two and a half years at a cost of less than \$20,000.00 total.

Mr. WALBERG. Oh, that is a savings. If it produces the quality, and you have indicated that it has, as a result of what the employers are saying, I appreciate that. Let me move on to another track. Parental involvement in the education of their children, and I see that as good. With all due respect, I do not see that as anything other than how it ought to be. It is paramount to a student's success.

However, in recent years we have seen a push by teachers' unions, and school districts, sadly, to exclude parents from the education of their children. This is why I recently introduced the Protect Kids Act with Senator Tim Scott. Ms. Gentles, you noted in your written testimony the harmful impacts of ideological indoctrination in our schools, especially on young children.

Do you believe this is driving a wedge between parents and their own children?

Mrs. GENTLES. Well absolutely, and it is designed to. The idea of telling children that their parents—

Mr. WALBERG. It is designed to?

Mrs. GENTLES. Yes. When we are talking about gender ideology specifically, there is an intention there to tell children things that are biologically false, that a child could be born in the wrong body, or a child might be born a boy, a girl, both, or neither. Then instruct the child that if their parent questions them on this, that they bring that information home, that their parent is a bigot, and that their parent is hateful.

If the child chooses to choose one of the 70 plus gender identities that are taught in school, that—and if the parent questions that, then the parent must want them dead. There is a lot that is always pushed out there about suicide, or the parent will kick them out. The child will be homeless.

There is absolutely a wedge that is being driven. Then when we talk about gender support plans, that is intentionally hiding information, so it creates a secret between the school and the child that they are keeping from the parent. That is a very clear wedge.

Mr. WALBERG. Yes, where a disagreement, or not to keep secrets causes great concerns. Would you say that it would be important then if the schools do this intentionally, keeping those secrets they should lose their Federal funding?

Mrs. GENTLES. Actions have to be taken. It has to be sent in a very clear message to districts that—and to schools, that this is not acceptable. We see State legislation that is addressing this, and I understand that you and Senator Scott have introduced legislation as well. Those messages have to be sent very clearly, that gender support plans, keeping secrets from parents, pushing children down a path to medical transition must stop. There must be a consequence.

Mr. WALBERG. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you so much. Ms. Bonamici, I now recognize you for 5 minutes.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you, Chair Foxx and Ranking Member Scott. I want to start by expressing my strong opposition to the notion that the solution to the so-called crisis in American education

is to funnel taxpayer dollars to unaccountable private schools, and for-profit charter schools. Voucher programs of all types, whether they are traditional vouchers, education savings accounts, or tax credit scholarships, undermine the effectiveness of public education.

Research has shown repeatedly that vouchers do not improve student achievement, and when policymakers make a conscious decision to give coupons to certain students to attend private schools, their message to the millions of students still attending public schools is you do not matter, it is not important to use to equip your school to serve you, and all students well.

A real crisis in American education is that many of my colleagues in Congress and in State legislatures, are applying a device of strategy rooted in discrimination toward an exclusion of LGBTQ students, and students with disabilities, trying to censor and silence content that does not fit their political ideology and agenda, defunding public schools, and failing to address gun violence.

I spent more than 15 years as an active parent volunteer in public schools, and an advocate for public education. I was in many schools, many classrooms, and many conversations. We can all agree that parent and family engagement is an instrumental part of creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive public school environment for all students.

I welcome the opportunity to work with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to uplift best practices, evidence based practices in family engagement, rather than pit parents against their kid's educators and schools.

Governor Polis, it is great to see you. Welcome back. I am grateful for your leadership in closing the opportunity gap for students in Colorado and in helping students recover lost learning time from the pandemic. You understand that developing parent and family engagement strategies is a requirement under ESEA for schools receiving Federal funding.

I have a two-part question, and this is my first question. Why is it important for educators to authentically and meaningfully engage with parents and families, and how are Colorado's school districts implementing parent and family engagement strategies that reach culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse parents and families, and that support the health and well-being of LGBTQ students?

Governor POLIS. Thank you, Representative Bonamici. Involving parents is absolutely critical to success. When you look at best practices at the site level, principal, school leaders, at the classroom level teachers, one of the big markers for success is how well parents are included in that process. I have seen school leaders do inventory of skills of parents and find ways that parents can supplement and provide additional learning opportunities for kids.

At the classroom level, making sure that parents are partners, and know what their students are assigned for homework. A lot of new technologies have enabled more involvement with parents on a regular basis, which is absolutely wonderful toward achieving success.

We do it through conventional structures, like PTAs and PTOs, but also at the classroom level in new and innovative ways. When

you look at the bright spot schools that achieved two bands of achievement during the pandemic, which is a very challenging time, every school had their own localized strategy. One common theme across many of them were successful strategies to involve parents, and sometimes even the community at large in the education.

We appreciate the Federal investment, and helping to forge parent, student teacher partnerships with all learners, including learners from diverse backgrounds, which in a State like Colorado and many states across the country, often means you need to look at different languages. When you have parents that speak Spanish, or Vietnamese, or any other language, and you can't always just rely on the student as that translator.

It is often too much to put on the shoulders of a third or fourth grader, and the student itself might not be fully proficient in both languages. Making sure the schools have access to not just the second most language. In our State we are providing the access in Spanish is relatively easy. We have elementary schools in Aurora, Colorado that have 28 languages that parents speak at that school, and making sure it is successfully—

Ms. BONAMICI. I do not want to cut you off, but I just want to ask you about—you said you visited Chat. Is it Chatfield Elementary School?

Governor POLIS. Yes.

Ms. BONAMICI. You could tell when you enter a school, you know, there is a joy of learning, and you know, the students thriving. Can you tell us a little bit about the visit, and elaborate on how COVID relief funds helped make improvements possible, and helped your State focus on professional development for Chatfield.

Governor POLIS. Chatfield Elementary is a school in a lower income area of Grand Junction, Colorado, Clifton area. It was in turnaround status, which is our lowest performance status 3 years ago. They were able to improve to above average status over 3 years.

What did they do? Really of course, as always, the leadership and the team of educators play a key role. They better aligned their classroom practices to the standards. They engaged in extensive professional development. The ESSR funds were used by the school to provide literacy coaches and math coaches, and they were able to improve, over the last 3 years, to be above average. Three bands of performance over the last 3 years, which is quite remarkable.

Ms. BONAMICI. Thank you so much. I see I am over time. I yield back. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman FOXX. You are forgiven. Mr. Allen from Georgia, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLEN. Yes. Obviously, I thank you Chairwoman Foxx, and thank you to our witnesses. COVID shined a bright light on education in this country, and certainly a very bright light on the parents and their choices of what the best educational environment would be like for their children.

In the 12th District of Georgia, we are a proud home of the Heritage Academy, an independent school that offers crisis centered education, and then we have the Dublin city schools, a rural public school district that has implemented charter systems. Dublin City

schools offers the choice between two themed elementary schools for specific learning paths, a science technology engineering arts and math, or STEAM school, and a leadership in environmental awareness in public service, or LEAP school.

In fact, I was there when the young people recited Steven Covey's seven habits for success. It was impressive. I cannot recite those. We have clearly seen the advantages to school choice in our district. Ms. Gentles, can you explain some of the barriers that we face as far as school choice that we have here in our district in Georgia?

Ms. GENTLES. Well, there has been a great expansion of school choice over the last three decades. 45 states have charter school laws. Many states have open enrollment. Magnet school programs, which provide public school choice, and then of course, over 30 states have 65 or so private school choice programs. There is a wide array of options out there.

There are numerous studies showing that there are great benefits, specifically to the private school choice program, 26 out of 29 studies have shown that those programs benefit the public school students around them, so we definitely want to overcome any barriers that are there because these are beneficial programs.

Barriers in place seem to be myths. There are a lot of myths around school choice. I think it is important for people to recognize that what is said is often just a talking point, and not true. What needs to happen is that people, especially policymakers, need to talk to the families—often low income families, who are benefiting from school choice programs, and whose lives have been changed, and recognize that those myths need to be set aside, and those barriers need to be overcome, and those policies need to be implemented.

Mr. ALLEN. Heritage Academy is an example of a low income school where the kids are really rock stars, and doing great. Dr. Sullivan, you mentioned the importance of partnering with employers to prepare students with the right skills. In our district Tech Strong specialized vehicles, or better known as E-Z-GO, has partnered with the Richmond County School system to implement the reaching potential through manufacturing an RPM program to offer on the job training and employment opportunities, really to take kids from low-income neighborhoods, and just show them that you know, the American dream is for everybody.

I come from a business background in construction, and I believe that some skills are best learned through real world experiences, and I am proud that the 12th District of Georgia is not waiting until after high school graduation to give these kids the tools and the ambition they need to succeed.

Can you discuss how these types of partnerships with employers have created work-based learning opportunities for students and how Congress can ensure that work based learning opportunities are available to job seekers around the country?

Mr. SULLIVAN. Yes sir. Thank you, Mr. Allen. I would just point out that I think we all can agree that working and earning a living sooner, rather than later is a good thing. Ensuring that people are in a training program, an education program that also allows them

to be able to work and make a living, perhaps it is a registered apprenticeship, perhaps it is an earn while you learn model.

Regardless, starting with the business partner, and beginning with the end in mind. The end in mind being the skillset that the individual needs in order to be able to go to work in that environment. It doesn't stop there. That is the beginning. As we look at the student population, our average age student is 27—27. A full decade has passed for many of these students by the time they get to that employment circumstance.

I would just urge that Congress continue down the path of ensuring that it is about the value proposition. Many of the students that show up at our colleges, they only have six, eight, 10 weeks to get in, get the training they need, get out and make a living. But we also have to ensure that they are able to come back. They are able to continue that growth along the career path that is going to help them to sustain their families.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you very much, and Madam Chair, I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Allen. Mr. Takano, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to say I want to address my disappointment that extremists are being given a platform to push problematic narratives, and misinformation about hypothetical issues in order to spread confusion and distraction. It is distressing because the very, very young people that need our protection because they are the ones that are targeted with bullying and harassment.

As they grow older, even death, they are specifically trans minority individuals are specifically the targets of violence. Violent murder. It is now more than ever, it is critical for us to rise up to support, not scrutinize trans and queer students. We must be supportive of their parents as well.

All students deserve to feel safe, comfortable, and supported in their school so they can focus on their education. Supportive educators, whether they belong to a teachers' union or not, and there are supportive educators who are members of unions and supportive educators who are not, but they are essential. They are an essential resource for young people, especially transgender youth and queer youth who may feel isolated and unsafe.

With that, I just want to return back to the substance of why we are here. Governor Polis, welcome back. I want to focus on just the tremendous resource that were provided by both Republicans and Democrats. The CARES Act was a Republican led act. The ARPA was democratic, to meet the needs of states and school districts to safely reopen.

You mentioned some of the things that you have done with those resources, but I want to drill down and to the things that, you know, the pandemic. Unfortunately, the school closures were a result of a very real response to over a million of our fellow Americans dying. That is a fact.

Whether schools should have been opened up earlier, that is a matter of debate, but we need to focus on how we help young people now adjust to coming back to schools. Can you tell me what

kind of resources have gone into mental health services, and high schools, and kids that were teenagers kept in their homes.

Any teenager, regardless of you know, gender identity, or LGBTQ status or whatever, that is a tough time to sort of be couped up at home, but tell us about the readjustment that is going on in Colorado schools?

Governor POLIS. First of all, I think I speak for really all Governors just saying we are grateful for the flexibility, as well as superintendents that we had. I think we were able to meet local needs in each of the areas across our State very effectively, and we appreciate that the aid of both CARES and ARPA was allowed to be used to meet the local need, rather than a particular program or investment.

In many areas very simply, extended learning time, which means free summer academies for learners that are struggling, after school tutoring programs are supported widely with ESSR. Through the GEER piece, which we deeply appreciate, we are able to design a program that broke down barriers that existed between school districts and community colleges, and other educational entities to support aligned work toward improving student achievement.

We were also out of the American Rescue Act funds, able to fund the IMatter Program, which is providing mental health support. Every Colorado student has access to six free counseling sessions. One noteworthy aspect is the universality of it. They can be virtual, and they are in many places, areas where otherwise students might not be able to access a mental healthcare provider, or someone to talk to.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you. Thank you, Governor. Mr. Pulsipher, I have been interested in—well, as a former credential creep, I have seen professions, professional sort of certifications. I see the academic work you've got to do just to sort of expand. Physician assistant programs for example, I had one in my community college that you could get a physician's assistant certificate, or certification in 2 years.

Often people coming out of the military, they came to the community college just for that reason. Then the accrediting body, the independent accrediting body, said you had to make it a master's program. I am wondering if there is a way for us to reverse that trend because I am interested in people being able to get high-paying credentials, but what do we really need to do to educate that person?

Governor POLIS. We would welcome you to take a look at Federal involvement around expanding the scope of practice so people can practice with the training they have. We have been very thoughtful about applying a skill's based hiring model to the State, as well as expanding the scope of practice for nurse assistants and others, so they can practice fully up to their level of training, and do not require additional college just for the sake of college.

We would welcome increased Federal interest in that, and we look forward to visiting with you off line about that.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. I meant that for—thank you, Governor Polis. I meant that for Mr. Pulsipher, but my time is running out, and I wish—I will talk to you both.

Chairwoman FOXX. I will allow Mr. Pulsipher to answer the question since there was a misunderstanding.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you, Representative Takano, thank you, Chairwoman as well. I think we would have to agree with you on that point, which is that the better we can do to design learning outcomes that directly map to the skills that are needed in the workforce, and make sure that in fact individuals who are traversing those programs, are assessed against their proficiency against that.

That we want to make sure there is more traversable, more accessible, and that individuals can get into the workforce sooner rather than later. There is certainly, even the bachelor's degree notion itself, this idea that you have to have 120 credits of learning before you are actually ready for the opportunities, like that itself is actually a pretty heavy lift, and we have seen that creeping go up in teacher preparation programs where it is very difficult to even deliver teacher prep in a 4-year program.

That is being done by states, and you know, and different bodies in nursing and healthcare, and places like that. That is troubling as you consider the costs and the readiness of the graduates that we are trying to get through those programs.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. I now recognize Congressman Banks from this great State of Indiana.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman FOXX. I thank him for his patience.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you. Governor, I used to live in Colorado. I always respected you, long before you were elected to office. You were not afraid to go against the grain and stand out and talk about education reform, charter schools, school choice, and that is something I have always admired about you.

I was the first Member of Congress during the pandemic to introduce a bill to keep schools open during the pandemic, and I watched closely what was going on in Colorado at the time. You were outspoken as well about keeping our kids in school where they belong.

You took a lot of criticism for it. In fact, back in a press conference in July 2020, you were quoted saying, "I believe we cannot interrupt education. We cannot sacrifice our future, and our children's future just because of the pandemic." You took a lot of heat and criticism for saying that. The teachers' unions howled about it.

The Colorado Education Association expressed their great disappointment in you for saying that, and they were outraged at your decision to keep schools open. Obviously, we learned a lot of lessons during the pandemic, but when it comes to keeping our kids in school do you feel vindicated by that decision, looking backward? Some of the lessons that you learned from going against the grain, going against the teachers' union, and the criticism of some in the political class, to keep our kids in the classroom?

Governor POLIS. Well, thank you, and again congratulations on Indian's Explore, Engage and Experience Grant funded through the American Rescue Act funds. It was a difficult situation in that there were multiple constituencies. You had parents, some of whom

wanted to send their kids back to school, some of them who were not yet ready to do that and wanted to continue online.

You had teachers ready to return to the classroom, eager to return to the classroom. You had other teachers, some of them with pre-existing health conditions that were not. We tried to work with our school districts as best we could to return in person instruction. What does that mean?

We had a program where we offered, for instance, free masks to every teacher and every student who wanted them, as a way to encourage students and classes to return. The majority of our school districts were back all of the 2020 school year. Like in a lot of states there were some of the larger municipal districts that took a few more months to fully return to in person instruction.

We wanted to be partners with parents, with teachers, with school leaders, and what do you need to be able to get back to the classroom so that we can continue to move forward.

Mr. BANKS. You wrote a letter to Education Secretary Cardona last April denouncing changes proposed by the Biden administration of Federal rules to make it harder for charter schools to get startup grants. You followed that up with an op ed in the Washington Post titled, "The Education Department's fix for Charter Schools is Misguided."

You made the case for charter schools by saying they are some of the most innovative, accessible, and successful schools in Colorado, and across the country, and that we should support charter schools, and that the Biden administration's effort is undermining the success of charter schools.

You know Governor, I could not agree with you more on that. Do you stand by what you wrote in that letter, and the article in the Washington Post?

Governor POLIS. Charter schools mean different things in different states because the different states have different authorization laws. The lens that I really tried to frame this crisis, quality, access, equity, and affordability. Done right, public charter schools can contribute to quality, to access, to equity, and affordability.

While I did not think that the change in the rules were necessary, I was pleased the Department of Education did incorporate many of the comments, and critics like myself included, to make the changes more workable to help support new charter schools.

Mr. BANKS. What else should the Biden administration do to support charter schools?

Governor POLIS. You know I would encourage the administration to really lean into innovation in all its forms, as the Obama administration did, and the Trump administration did. That means that whether it is an innovative district program, a charter school, or a hybrid type program, we should support excellence and innovation. Now that also means, of course, accountability and quality.

It does not mean we should be throwing money at programs that do not work, but that key role that the Federal Government can do is to help to be a catalyst before the schools open and get their funding, and that is really what the Charter School Innovation Grants are meant to do. Like any public school, they are self-sustaining over time.

Before they come online they often need help, and I think that is a very fruitful area to look at investment around how we can encourage districts and charter schools to innovate.

Mr. BANKS. Governor, I have three daughters. You have a daughter. Do you think it is unfair that biological boys are allowed to compete against biological girls in sports?

Governor POLIS. Well, my daughter is 8 years old. She plays in Little League baseball in Boulder, Colorado, and it is a co-ed league. It is probably about 10 percent girls, about 90 percent boys. She is every bit as competitive as them, and you know, some of the girls want to be on the same team. We have about half the girls on our team, even though they are about 10 percent across the league.

If I was not Governor, or in Congress, I would probably be the coach.

Mr. BANKS. Pretty soon your 8-year-old will be 15–16, and I wonder how you will feel at that point. With that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much Mr. Banks. I now recognize Dr. Adams from North Carolina for her 5 minutes.

Ms. ADAMS. Thank you, Madam Chair, and congratulations on your appointment. You know, as a retired educator of 40 years, as a proud mom of a public-school principal, I just want to echo the sentiments of my colleague, Ms. Wilson, and President Biden last night. Clearly, we have got to do better by our teachers.

Governor Polis, thank you for being here. Welcome back. In 2019 you announced a road map to build on college affordability efforts in Colorado. As an avid supporter of programs like the Sea Campus Program, and many of the emergency grant programs spurned by Federal COVID relief dollars, I was excited to see that one of the strategic goals within this road map is to increase college completion.

As we both know, many students struggle with barriers to completion, such as lack of access to childcare services, or even struggling to access funding to cover tuition, or last-minute emergencies. Governor, would you talk a little bit about promising efforts institutions in Colorado have used to enhance wraparound support services that help students thrive, both academically and non-academically?

Governor POLIS. Using American Rescue dollars, we recently, last year, made it free to get a community college degree in healthcare related fields. We all know the urgent needs of the healthcare workforce. That includes EMT, phlebotomists, nurse assistant, a number of others. When I went to Community College of Aurora to announce that program, one young man shared his experience with me.

He was training to become an EMT. Since we made it free, and by the way it is a real free, meaning not only no tuition, no textbooks, no fees, it is completely free. He said with the money that I saved because this program is free, I was able to fix my car to get to college. That is what we mean when we say wraparound services.

It is about how do you get there. If you have a 3-year-old kid, how does your kid have childcare so that you can attend the pro-

gram to better yourself and your earning livelihood? We have to look at this expansively when we look at barriers. Yes, cost is one of them, but it could be something as simple as time of day, because you have to have a full-time job during the day. You need an evening program.

You might need childcare. You might need transportation. You might need assistance with food. We have a hunger free campus's initiative because it is hard enough to learn on a full stomach, how hard is it to learn on an empty stomach?

Those are some of the ideas that we have been able to use American Rescue Act funds to pursue.

Ms. ADAMS. Great. Thank you very much. Madam Chair, I am going to yield back the remainder of my time.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. You get a gold star. Mr. Owens, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you. Thank you very much. First of all, I wanted to congratulate all of you. This has been well overdue. This conversation. This is an area that we have had problems for decades, and we are now seeing the results of that. I was aware back in 2017, to see reports coming out of the Department of Education, that 75 percent of the black boys in the State of California could not pass standard reading and writing tests.

Now unfortunately, as terrible as that news is, it kind of went over the head of most people. They were not surprised. They just kind of figured that is the way it is. Well, now we are seeing across the country the power of the unions that led this demise of education and hopes in California was going across our country.

I think it is timely that we are doing this. I think now, this country, we are waking up. We do what we do best. We are going to win, get our kids back, and give them the chance to really believe in the American dream. I want to thank everyone here for your background, for your expertise, and for educating us and the American people. We are going to get this taken care of.

Mr. Pulsipher, the costs of obtaining post-secondary credentials has nearly tripled the rate of inflation over the last two decades, forcing students to borrow for degrees without any guarantee that it will see a financial return for the time and money invested in the program.

In your testimony you mentioned institutions like students and taxpayers, need to have skin in the game when it comes to student loans, such as requiring them to reimburse students and taxpayers for the share of the financial loss associated with non-repayment. How would this such requirement change incentives for colleges and universities when it comes to degree programs they offer, and the price that they charge students?

How would this improve the value proposition to post-education, post-secondary education?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you for that question, Representative Owens. Fundamentally, I think if we believe that higher education is intended to be a path to opportunity, and enable the economic and mobility of the students it serves, there are probably two parts to that question. First and foremost, are institutions held accountable to providing and developing programs that actually map to workforce opportunities?

That also, by the way, includes liberal education, whether it is in humanities, or languages, et cetera. It is like you still have to design those in a way that you are also intending to increase the readiness of the graduates in those programs for the work.

If the other part of that equation is what is the investment we are actually making, asking the students to make in that program. When you have institutions, or you are expecting institutions, requiring institutions to have greater skin in the game, they are going to—is going to force greater accountability to designing and develop programs that are relevant to the future work, and to also keep their costs in check.

Right now, there is no check against the cost of delivering education, such that you have seen as you pointed out, that the cost of attending a completed degree has risen to more than twice the rate of inflation for many decades now, since 1980. If the average cost of requiring a bachelor's degree is nearing \$100,000.00 of the outcomes, the value, like how many jobs are worth it to make that kind of investment?

We can certainly find ways by which we hold institutions to greater accountability for both the cost of completing the credential, and that those credentials are relevant to the opportunity.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you. Dr. Sullivan, I agree with the workforce system must do a better job to get Americans off the sidelines, equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in today's economy. For more than two decades Utah has integrated their workforce development system with other safety net programs to provide unemployed workers a streamlined way to access the support they need to secure jobs.

Can you discuss how strong regional, and statewide coordination between workforce development and human services providers can improve outcomes for the individuals they serve, what are the updates on WIOA that are needed to lead more states to pursue innovative approaches to workforce planning and service delivery?

Mr. SULLIVAN. Sorry. Thank you for the question. I think the integration between services that are provided, oftentimes we provide the services to individuals that are not necessarily under WIOA. They may fall under a separate portion of State government, a separate policy act, but the coordination has to be there. Not just simply the agencies working together, but also data.

While we continue to provide the privacy that is necessary, but also ensure that we are able to provide the benefits, the wrap-around services that you heard the Governor talk about a few minutes ago. I think what we should focus on is to look back to see what students are doing as a result of some of the lack of coordination that is going on.

Today we may hear that enrollment is down in 2-year colleges. The fact of the matter is enrollment is down in credit enrolled programs. The traditional programs. Students are showing up at our doorstep in long lines because they want to be a part of a short-term workforce opportunity that provides that value proposition that you just heard from President Pulsipher.

The value proposition that gets them into the workforce in a shortened period of time. We cannot sustain individuals for 4 years while they go through degree programs. They simply need the edu-

cation and skills to get into the workforce, and then education becomes a little bit different than what we have seen in the past. It becomes iterative—work and go to school, and continue to grow that job path, perhaps through the Baccalaureate degree, or even graduate degrees, but you must start somewhere.

I think the most important part is to ensure that we get people into the economy.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you once again. I appreciate this conversation. It is well overdue. Thank you so much.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. Ms. Jayapal, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to spend my time just talking a little bit about Federal student aid, which is designed to help underserved students, and also the role of for-profit colleges. I feel that sadly for-profit colleges have been more interested in using these funds to pay their pockets.

I have met personally with students, including from the Art Institute of Seattle, whose for-profit colleges abruptly closed before they could graduate. All of their tragic stories end in the same way. High student debt, low-quality education, and taxpayers ultimately footing the bill.

In contrast, owners of for-profit colleges emerge unscathed, and proceed with business as usual. Of the nearly 1,100 colleges that closed between 2010 and 2020, an overwhelming 86 percent of them were for-profits. When one of these students tries to continue their education, they find that 83 percent of their credits are ineligible to transfer because of the school's poor accreditation and reputation.

I really think this undermines all of the good work that many of you are doing on this panel to provide a quality education. Let me ask you, and we can start with you Mr. Pulsipher, is it a good use of taxpayer funds to invest in these schools when you, yourself, are trying to make sure that people really have faith in the educational system?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you for that question, Representative Jayapal. The reality is that access without completion, to your point, and also completion without value, both of those are, and can be a moral hazard. We have certainly seen that occur in many sectors of higher education.

I think that emphasizes the point as even Governor Polis said, we need innovation that expands access. We also need innovation that drives and aligns the value of those credential pathways to the opportunity. We also need that accountability that is necessary, such that we know that the Federal dollars, or even State level dollars, that they are actually going to institutions that can deliver real equity and access, and equity attainment because equity and access without attainment quite frankly can be a scam.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Your answer would be no, it is not a good use of taxpayer dollars to invest in those programs.

Mr. PULSIPHER. The only thing I would caution is that it is not necessarily exclusive to for profit institutions.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Understood.

Mr. PULSIPHER. You have to look at all institutions and programs initially.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Yes. I agree with you. I am just focusing on for-profit because it has been such a huge, you know, it has been such a huge abuse in my view. Governor Polis, did you want to add anything to that?

Governor POLIS. Yes. I think looking at accountability and ROI, one step more than accountability across all modalities, online and in person, all types of formation, which could be public, non-profit, for-profit, you are stewards of taxpayer money. You want to make sure that Congress wants to make sure that you are making good investments that benefit people, rather than to leave them in a worse place than they were. That is across all modalities and forms of higher education.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Well, the administration has taken this very seriously, and they have established a rule called the Borrower Defense Rule, which streamlines student debt cancellation for students who are defrauded by these schools, like those from the Art Institute in my district.

Governor Polis, what are the consequences for students who are defrauded by their school, or misled about their career prospects?

Governor POLIS. First of all, I think that is an excellent step. These are students who, through no fault of their own, because in your own investigating college that looks accredited, you know, you cannot know all the details of whether they are going to go out of business, and you did accept Federal money to do that, so there's some assumption there the Federal Government did some diligence.

I think canceling the debt on degrees that turned out not to be worth anything, like ITT or colleges that went out of business, is a fair and very reasonable thing to do. A better thing to do would be diligence on the front end, to make sure that students do not have to waste the time and money alongside the Federal investment.

Many of them put their own money, and of course, they all put their own time to make sure that the programs that are supported are high quality across all modalities, across all types of entities that offer them.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Yes. I completely agree with you, which is why I am focusing on these for-profit colleges, and the work upfront. The Federal Government has a responsibility to prevent abuses of taxpayer dollars, which is why I have a bill called Students Not Profits Act. Last Congress, the Build Back Better Act proposed stopping for profits from receiving its Pell Grant investments.

Governor Polis, how does limiting for profit access to Federal student aid prevent students from being abused?

Governor POLIS. Well, I think you are, of course, correct in identifying that a higher percentage of the problems stem from for profits. I would also say that we would have the same problem with a poorly run public institution, or a poorly run non-profit institution.

As the data shows a correlation, that is clear, but I think making sure that all providers of education are accountable across, whether it is online or in person, whether it's for-profit, non-profit, or public, can help make sure that not only is Congress better stewards of

taxpayer money, but also that students get better educational outcomes that improve the quality of their lives.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Thank you, Governor, and thanks to the panel. Do I get a gold star, too, Madam Chair? I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. I now recognize Mr. Good for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOOD. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Just to followup on what was just the question line that was just had, and my friends on the other side just despise the term profit generally, when it applies to a business, let alone education. I have an issue with these colleges with billion, multi-billion dollar endowments who are allowing college costs to soar exponentially for non-academic additions of staff and otherwise, I would call that for profit by the way.

That said, I am going to direct a couple of questions to Mrs. Gentles. Thank you for being with us today. In your testimony, you said it is related to what we were talking about, costs. Over the last 20 years, K to 12 administrative staff and public schools have increased by 88 percent, while student enrollment only increased by 8 percent.

I doubt you would try to justify, but can you begin to think of how that might be justified, and what the impact has been from this—besides the exorbitant increase in costs, by increasing administrative staff 88 percent?

Mrs. GENTLES. Right. I mentioned that in my written testimony, and I also mentioned that inflation adjusted public school funding has risen by 152 percent. Teacher's salaries have only increased by 8 percent since 1970, so we have been hearing a lot about teacher's salaries. There seems to be an obvious fix, and that is to redirect K-12 funding to fund classroom activities and teachers, rather than administrative bloat.

It is laid out very clearly that the districts have grown in size, and they have hired more and more adults, and that does not serve the needs of students, and it certainly does not benefit teachers.

Mr. GOOD. No question about it. I have seen that across my district, across my home State of Virginia, and across the country where even where student population is decreasing, and we are not directing resources appropriately to the classroom where it makes an academic difference. Instead, we are directing resources to non-academic positions, administrative bloat, or worse.

Changing gears a little bit, but appallingly, and inexcusably again, in Virginia, in Fairfax County, not far from here, multiple schools are being investigated for unlawful discrimination because of a failure to notify students about their national merit scholar recognition even after some college application deadlines has passed.

It is reported that a school official in Fairfax County actually told a parent that they wanted to inform the students in a low-key way about their recognition, their achievement, in order not to hurt the feelings of those who did not achieve the same level of academic achievement.

This district, also by the way, has spent \$450,000.00 on equity consultants for administrators, perhaps part of that 88 percent increase in costs for non-teaching staff. Can you imagine any justification for that? Why we would not appropriately want to recog-

nize students who were performing excellently so they can earn scholarships accordingly for that achievement?

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, there seems to be a movement afoot to take away the idea of merit to no longer push children to achieve, or to even differentiate children by skill levels, or challenge them with different levels of courses that they can choose from, and so this is all part of that initiative.

Another number to throw out for Fairfax County is that they had 170 million dollars left in their ESSR funding as of last fall that they had not spent. We have been hearing wonderful examples of uses of ESSR funds that districts in the State of Colorado have invested in, and yet in Virginia, there was two billion dollars overall that the districts had not yet spent last fall of this ESSR funding.

Clearly, it was not used to reopen schools because Virginia was, I think, like the sixth worst in the Nation, and my children were kept out of schools because of that in Arlington County, and suffered as a result. It was isolating. It caused harm, emotionally, academically, mentally, and we are seeing all kinds of problems in Arlington County where I live with behavior, with drugs, and other issues.

Why were these ESSR funds spent? Why is there this focus on keeping children down, rather than opening schools and educating them?

Mr. GOOD. Well said. History will judge us harshly for how we sacrificed children on the altar of poor political decisions, harmful political decisions over the last 2 years. We were told that we needed 25 billion dollars to safely open schools. We gave the schools 200 billion. I use the term we loosely, because I voted against all of that.

We gave the schools 200 billion when children were at no risk of getting seriously ill from the virus. It is nice to look around this room and not see the masks that we know never worked, never prevented transmission of a virus. What we did to the children, it has already been mentioned today. The lost learning that they will never recover from, and there is no plan to recover from that because we put teachers' unions ahead of students throughout this whole process.

We continue to do it today. I have some questions for you about teachers' unions, but thanks for your testimony, and thanks for being here today, and I yield back, Madam Chairwoman.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. Mrs. McBath, I recognize you. Oh. Okay. I am sorry. Ms. Hayes. You are on the list, I am sorry. Yes. Ms. Hayes, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott, for having this hearing. Thank you to all the witnesses that are here today. There are so many important things to consider in this committee. I can talk about the fact that any good teacher knows and encourages parental involvement, because they know that is key to student success.

I can talk about the fact that teachers support all students, regardless of orientation or identity. I could educate the people in this room about the fact that members of teachers' unions are in fact teachers. I could talk a little bit about the fact that education funding is not—it is appropriated, but it is not spent on the first

day of the school year because many academic programs have to play themselves out over the year.

Today, I will focus on my questions on the labor shortage that was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. I have to remind everyone once again that we cannot consider any conversation surrounding the crisis in education without the backdrop of a global pandemic in which over 1 million people died.

About the fact that the children who are in our schools, many of them lost family members, and that has impacted them. These were unprecedented times, and we relied on the sciences, and conducted ourselves accordingly as we got information. Back to the labor shortage.

With teachers, healthcare workers, and childcare providers opting for early retirement, our country was faced to force the uncomfortable reality that we have long neglected to prioritize our workforce development. With the U.S. economy seeing record breaking job creation under the leadership of President Biden, employers still have millions of job openings to fill.

In Connecticut, childcare workers dropped 28 percent from 2019 to 2020, and according to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than half of the country's public schools reported being understaffed at the start of the 2022–2023 school year. 69 percent of public schools reported that the primary challenge staffing classrooms was they had too few teacher candidates applying for open positions.

In my State of Connecticut, we had over 1,000 openings weeks before the school year began. In the 117th Congress, we passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022, that would have been a historic 78-billion-dollar investment in training one million workers annually until 2028. The legislation included my bill, the Youth Bill for the Future Act, which invests 1 billion into youth build programs over 6 years and improves support for vulnerable people.

Mr. Sullivan, I thank you for your conversations about workforce development—and I believe this is a bipartisan issue that this committee should be able to find common ground on. Governor Polis, you mentioned that Colorado offers free community and technical colleges for students pursuing careers in healthcare and is hoping to expand this to early childhood education.

Can you describe some of the difficulties with recruiting and retaining early childhood educators, and do you see youth employment as a significant contributor to the workforce shortage?

Governor POLIS. Thank you. We are launching this fall free universal preschool for every 4-year-old in our State. It was a voter passed initiative that we put on the ballot and championed, and in our State it got 67.7 percent of the vote, which means it passed in red counties, in blue counties, rural and urban, people of our State overwhelmingly said kids ought to be able to go to preschool.

Now that is funded. Along with that, we need more early childhood educators, and again, it is quality. It is not about a place to park your child, of course the immediate workforce benefit does help them. It is about preparing a child for the skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. We are looking to expand our Care For It Program funded from American Rescue Act, which currently

funds free community college degrees in the healthcare fields to include free community college degree for early childhood educators, also for para professionals that play such a critical role of support in our schools.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. I love that. As an educator I know that college is not for everyone, so we have to make sure that we have equal opportunities for a career in technical training and workforce development for today's economy. Do you believe that Colorado would benefit from increased funding in programs like Youth Build, or these workforce development type initiatives?

Governor POLIS. Absolutely. To get to your second piece, incorporating workforce training for high school students especially that are not going on to college is an incredible pathway to success for them, and very important for the economy. That can be done for instance, by expanding flexibility under WIOA, for in school training programs.

We have entire high schools like Colorado early college high school, where every student graduates with an associate's degree. We have other high schools where many students graduate with certificates in certain skills to be ready to enter the workforce after they graduate if they are not going on to higher education.

Mrs. HAYES. Thank you. You made me lose my gold star. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. We will try to figure out some way to recognize others. Ms. McClain, you are recognized for 5 minutes. The members of the committee can tell you about the report cards they got last time, and what a difference they made. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I will try and adhere to the gold star standard. I just want to caution everyone on the term of the word free. We seem to throw that word free out as if there is no one that pays the bill. I might remind you someone is paying the bill, and free is a very slippery slope because if it was free that would indicate that no one pays the bill. Somebody is paying the bill.

With that said, thank you all for being here today. Mr. Pulsipher, and I hope I am saying that right, I want to start with you. Is it your testimony you mentioned in December 2022, that the Government Accountability Office issued a report showing that roughly half of student aid offer letters calculated students out of pocket costs by factoring in loans.

This means that students and families could be misled into believing that certain forms of student aid do not have to be paid back. Last Congress I introduced the College Cost Transparency Act, and Student Protection Act, which I will be reintroducing this Congress.

I think transparency and honesty, and knowing what you are getting into is critical for the student, as well as the parent, as well as the colleges. My question is this. Do you believe colleges should be required to inform students of financing options that include personal resources, Federal student loans, or work study and private plus loans?

In addition to ensuring financial aid offers are transparent, that one other—that is question No. 1. Then I would like to hear your

thoughts on what other ways can Congress really simplify the college shopping process?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you for that question, Representative McClain. What we have certainly learned from our own responsible borrowing initiative is that the more you give complete understanding, or the more you give complete transparency to the full cost of attending or completing your program, that individuals make better choices about how they fund that program.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Agreed.

Mr. PULSIPHER. That includes, by the way, the total cost of financing that through Federal aid and Federal loans, and so they need to understand that if in fact the total cost of what you are intending that it is inclusive of not just tuition, books and fees, but that also includes room and board, and other student life fees, or anything else like that.

I think what you would find if you inspected the increased cost of attendance over time, that tuition, net tuition remained relatively flat, but all these other costs started going up substantially, and the students have to pay for that.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Do you see a downside in being transparent with all those costs?

Mr. PULSIPHER. A downside to the institutions maybe, because in fact you are going to put at risk some of the revenue dollars that they are currently achieving, meaning that there is no downside ultimately for the student. Like if you keep the focus on the student.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Right. Which is why the institution is there to educate the student, correct?

Mr. PULSIPHER. I think it is absolutely true. You heard that in my testimony. If everything we could do, we would actually put the student at the center of higher education.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Amen to that.

Mr. PULSIPHER. For them, that we are trying to deliver the value.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. I do not mean to be rude, but in the interest of time, do you know any other ways, or suggestions that Congress can simplify the college shopping?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Yes. There is certainly one presumption you can have, even if students do not take out Federal aid, that virtually all of them apply for FAFSA, or they fill out the FAFSA, such that in that process itself there are means and mechanisms by which you could introduce the students an understanding of what is actually the cost and the return on that investment you were going to make by choosing that program at that institution, and what alternative recommendations might there be that actually have a higher value.

Each of us experiences, in an online shopping world, recommendations, yes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Yes. Thank you for that. I think it is interesting that you talked about return on investment, because that almost sounds like you are getting value for your dollar, and you are kind of getting into that profit margin, which is scary.

My second is in your testimony you noticed that colleges over charge post-graduate students more than the actual costs of that degree because there is no cap on borrowing. Would you agree col-

leges should be more transparent, and make it clear to potential post-grad students that they will be overcharged for these degrees? What limits, if any, should Congress place on borrowing at the graduate level?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Again, if we start with the assumption that the students are being asked to make an investment in their education so they can change their life for the better, the more information they have about the total cost of completing that, and the return that they are going to get for that investment, they are going to make better choices today. Institutions are not held accountable because of the unlimited amount that can be borrowed in grad plus loans.

We certainly have seen through the studies, including that which is advanced by the Wall Street Journal, that many of those programs do not actually fundamentally deliver any economic return, and yet the costs are exorbitantly high.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Hence the return on investment.

Mr. PULSIPHER. That is right. For the student.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. With that, I yield back. Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Ms. McClain. Ms. Leger Fernandez, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Thank you so much, Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott. Governor Polis, we did not serve together, but we are neighbors. You are our Vecinos up there in Colorado, and we share many things between Colorado and New Mexico. I will say our green chili is better than your green chili. I know you are going to agree on that.

The issue of the early childhood education by a vote of 70 to 30, New Mexico has not targeted to put more resources into our earliest—you know, the babies right? That is where we need to invest, because we know that has such an amazing return. Yes, it is an investment. The return though, is about allowing a child to realize their full potential, and that is what education is supposed to be about.

Education is what we use to make sure we have a democracy. Education is what we use to make sure that our economy thrives, and so I really do believe that we need to pay teachers what they deserve, because as we increase pay in New Mexico, we saw that a teacher gap dropped. It makes sense, right? In a tight labor market, you need to pay teachers what they have earned and deserve.

I wanted to talk to you a little bit about college affordability. I am going to be reintroducing former Congressman Levin's America's College Promise Act. Under the bill the Federal Government would partner with states at a 75/25 percent share to provide tuition free community college to all students, for whatever they want to study, whether it be a nurse, whether they want to get some of their degrees and training that they need to be welders, to know how to be an electrician, the wide range of things, right?

We showed last year we made college free in New Mexico. What happened? Enrollment went up, but that is what happens when you provide the means and opportunity. Can you share how you think Colorado's and New Mexico's effort to address college afford-

ability could be enhanced with that Federal State partnership that I described in the American's College Promise?

Governor POLIS. Yes. There is no question that reducing the cost of higher education promotes equity, improves access, and affordability, which were many of the barriers. When we, through the Care Forward Program, with the American Rescue Act funds, made training in many of the healthcare related fields, phlebotomy, nurse assistant, EMT free, it increased participation in these programs by about a third.

We now have 1,000 people in our workforce today filling key roles in healthcare because they were able to access the tuition for free. To tell you in the first part of your comment, and I/we admire New Mexico's investment in early childhood education, we are following along in Colorado as well.

Not having childcare for your kid can also be a barrier to education, so when you look at how to make sure that a young mom can be able to go to school, to be able to get the skills she needs to earn a living, if she has a 2-year old, or a 4-year old at home, it is important that we have a real life solution that meets their needs as well.

When you look at all of these barriers that can occur, break them down, and at the same time making sure that both the State and Federal Governments, as well as the individuals getting the educational learner, are getting the return on investment for their time and money, meaning increased earning potential, meaning the ability to find a job, meaning the abilities to support themselves and their family.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Thank you, Governor Polis. We have had a lot of conversation today about apprenticeships. We have seen that Democrats have been incredibly supportive of apprenticeships. I think that was one of the first bills that we reported to the floor of the House.

I remember it was one of the first bills that I got to stand up and say, you know, pass, I am in favor of this. It passed out of the House. According to the Department of Labor, 93 percent of apprentices complete their program, and then earn on average \$77,000.00 a year.

We heard earlier the Ranking Member talk about the \$1.44 return that those who participate in these. You have registered for an apprenticeship program in your State. Tell us how that works, and how that could be a model as we move forward on apprenticeships. I tell you, I am really—this is important for me because we are a State in transition.

Governor POLIS. Yes. We embrace all of the above. Registered apprenticeships, apprenticeships are earned while you learn models, including through career wise model, working with high schoolers. There are many people that a barrier to getting the skills they need is they cannot leave their day job.

They have to work to support themselves, so how can we incorporate getting the educational skills they need to earn a better living into the time they spend at work.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Thank you, Governor Polis, and I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. Ms. Miller, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, Chairwoman Fox. Governor Polis, emails reveal that teachers in Colorado schools were discussing a left-wing political ideology called gender identity with elementary school students. Governor Polis, do you think it is appropriate for an adult teacher to talk to an 8-year old girl about changing her gender?

Governor POLIS. I have not seen those emails. Please share them with the school district. You are also welcome to share them with us. These are not part of our State standards or curriculum around health, or around social studies.

Mrs. MILLER. Well, I appreciate that you were saying that you care about involving parents and protecting the children, but Governor we are talking about five, six and 7 year old children, and we would like to know do you think it is appropriate for adults to be talking to them about sexual orientation and gender transitioning behind their parents back?

We do know this happened in Larimer County Laurel Elementary School. We have emails.

Governor POLIS. What is important is that the teachers, the principals, meet the needs of all learners, all students, no matter who they are, no matter how they identify.

They need to learn math, reading and writing, and we need to involve the parents in making sure the kids are able to get the education they need no matter what their faith is, no matter what their gender is, or no matter any of the other great aspects of diversity that make our country a stronger place.

Mrs. MILLER. You think it is appropriate? You have not answered the question yet. I want to know is it appropriate for adults to talk to an 8-year-old about sex and gender without parents' knowledge?

Governor POLIS. Well, again, I do not know the answer that you are referring to, but obviously I have a third grader, and a fifth grader, and their classmates know that they have two dads, and it has never been a problem. Obviously, if parents want to have discussions with other kids about what they think or do not think about having two dads, they are welcome to.

Mrs. MILLER. Well, this is a parent sir, this is adult teachers having these discussions with very young children, five, six, 7-year-old children behind their parents' back. We want to know if you think it is appropriate.

Governor POLIS. Well, I do not know the answer you are referring to. I am sure you will be able to provide us with the information, but I can assure you that it is not part of our State standards. It is certainly not part of our age-appropriate health standards, nor is it a part of our social studies standards to have that as part of the curriculum at that age.

Mrs. MILLER. Can you see why parents are upset that adult teachers are talking to their 8-year-old children about sexual orientation and transitioning?

Governor POLIS. Well, again, I do not know the answer that you are referring to, but schools need to serve all learners, and that means kids with two dads, kids with two moms, kids who were

raised by their grandparents, kids who identify in different ways. No matter how they identify, or what background they come from, the schools are there to teach them reading, writing and math, and make sure that they can get the basics, so they can succeed in life.

Mrs. MILLER. Yes. We want to protect our children, and these are very young children that adults have been having discussions with behind parents' backs about sexual orientation, and gender transitioning, and we just want to know is it appropriate or not appropriate?

Governor POLIS. Again, if there is a particular incident that occurred in my State that you can share that with me, and we will be happy to share that with the school district, because I am not aware of the incident you are referring to. Again, it is not part of the standards to do that.

Again, schools have to deal with every variety of diversity that society has, and keep the focus on learning.

Mrs. MILLER. Thank you, sir. Since day one, the Biden administration has been pushing puberty blockers, and surgical castration on young children, while cutting parents out. In conjunction with teachers' unions, Biden is forcing woke political ideology in a school curriculum, while ignoring the core subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic.

Just yesterday, sadly, reports showed that 23 schools in Baltimore have zero students proficient in math. Zero. This is all fine to the Biden administration, as long as their children learn about woke politics, and something called gender identity. Parents are outraged, and this indoctrination of our young children must stop. We want our children to be educated and smart. Thank you and I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Ms. Miller. Mrs. McBath, you are recognized now.

Mrs. MCBATH. Thank you so much Chairwoman, and I just have to say I just really take offense to the continued use of wokeism referring to the democratic party. Mr. Pulsipher, thank you so much for being here today. It is good to see you.

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx, and Ranking Member Scott. Thank you to our guests that are here today, who join us to discuss this very critically important issues, and their impact on students and families across the country.

As I have said to this committee before, this coming week is an incredibly difficult week for me and many, many others, as so many are from the communities, families, and classrooms that have been torn apart by the crisis of rampant gun violence in our country.

Next week I continue to mourn, as we mark the fifth anniversary of the senseless murder of 17 students and their teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Next week I will also continue to mourn and commemorate what should have been my own son's 28th birthday on February 16.

For me and those who remain behind, the pain of having to bury a child, or losing a loved one never, ever truly goes away. You carry it with you always deep in your soul, but you just learn to manage it.

It is a pain that I would never wish on anyone here, but that possibility is a reality that students and their parents are facing every single day, as they go to school in the morning, or drop their kids off at the bus stop, before heading off to work.

From recurring lockdown drills to purchasing bulletproof backpacks for children still learning to read and write, students, teachers, and parents today are asked to endure the mental hardships and lasting trauma that they never had to face before school shootings began occurring at the terrifying frequency that our Nation sees today.

It is a preventable crisis that we cannot afford to ignore any longer, and it is critical that more steps be taken to address the epidemic of gun violence and school shootings that continue to plague our country. I applaud the important steps that we took to make schools safer through the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, but we can, and we must do more.

Every day that we refuse to enact the policies necessary to curb this epidemic, we allow more and more families to be torn apart and permanently scarred. We tell more and more students and parents and teachers, that their leaders and elected officials are comfortable letting them bear the emotional burden of losing a loved one or being maimed and killed in a moment's notice.

That is the reality that I, and so many families live every single day, and it is one that we must not allow to become the new normal for students, teachers, and families today.

My question is for Governor Polis. Governor Polis, can you briefly talk about why school climate and atmosphere, I mean is such an important factor in our children's educational outcomes, and what the elements of an effective school climate program look like?

Governor POLIS. We appreciate the bipartisan bill last year around improving gun safety, including funding for schools to implement common sense measures. We have added additional State resources around hardening, including single exit points and additional barriers, but that is too late in the process to have a discussion, as you have indicated.

There are a lot of forms of school violence. Obviously, the most extreme form we have seen is guns. We have also seen knives, fist-fights, and many other things. What you need is to make sure you have a positive school culture that supports all learners where everybody feels valued. A part of that is making sure kids have access to the mental health resources they need to get help when they need it.

They know who to talk to through the IMATTERS Program funded through Opera funds kids in Colorado can get six free counseling sessions privately when they need to. The information is posted up in the schools about how to do that and many school districts have invested in additional counseling to better support kids that have behavioral health needs to make sure before they lash out or take it out on others or themselves are able to get the help that the need.

Mrs. MCBATH. In response to your answer, what can we, as members of this body, do to prevent this culture, this really violent culture from furthering and just wreaking havoc on our schools?

Governor POLIS. I think really focusing on positive school culture and school environment, having site leaders, parents, educators involved, making sure that kids feel supported in schools, that their needs are met. They know who to go to if they see something and that the right intervention can occur promptly.

Mrs. MCBATH. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. I now recognize Mr. Moran for 5 minutes.

Mr. MORAN. Mrs. Gentles, thank you for being here today. I am going to direct my questions to you for just a few moments. You mentioned earlier the Parents' Bill of Rights that likely is going to come through this Committee this year. I want to read a statement to you and see if you would agree with this statement.

"The parental right to guide one's child intellectually and religiously is a most substantial part of the liberty and freedom of the parent." Would you agree with that?

Mrs. GENTLES. I would agree with that.

Mr. MORAN. This statement, as you likely know, was made in a 1925 U.S. Supreme Court case by the name of *Pierce v. The Society of Sisters*. There was a unanimous decision by the Supreme Court in 1925 to strike down the 1922 Oregon law that attempted to compel elementary school children to attend public schools to the exclusion of other choices.

In doing so, the Court, when it struck down this law said that it "Unreasonably interferes with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control." Would you agree also with that determination and finding?

Mrs. GENTLES. I would agree with that. I believe they also said that children were not mere creatures of the State and I certainly agree with that.

Mr. MORAN. That is right. Like you, I agree with these statements and agree with that precedent unanimously held by the Supreme Court almost a hundred years ago as a father of four school-aged children. You mentioned that you have two children. I have double that amount, but I have been in both Gifted and Talented meetings and also Art meetings.

I proudly serve my community by helping with an education foundation and hoping to start one for our public school system and I proudly send my kids to a public school system, the same one that I graduated from. I recognize that parents need choices, and every child is different and every decision for every child must be made by those parents in their education.

I wonder if you could comment about what you believe the role of this Committee should be and what we could do to preserve the parents' rights to guide the education of their children in this Nation.

Mrs. GENTLES. I think redirecting the K-12 education system to prioritize academic instruction is a big role. That is what parents want. They want schools to focus on academic instruction. They want Math and Reading to be at the center of what the child is presented at the school. They want academics, not activism and so there are numerous steps that you can take to do that. I think holding school districts accountable for what they did during the

COVID era, with closures that harmed children and how they spent the emergency funding, is it going to address learning loss. That is going to meet the needs of parents.

Then reinforcing Federal—existing Federal laws, PPRA, for making sure that parents know what their rights are under existing Federal law will be an important message that you can send from this Committee.

Mr. MORAN. Likewise, I would pose a similar question with respect to your advice to local school districts as they seek to partner with parents to be at the center of educational decisions for their local school districts. What advice would you give to be good partners with the parents at the local level?

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, the Federal Government did give them advice and said that parents needed to be consulted as part of the Federal funding and districts weren't even able to comply with that in many areas. There just needs to be a reckoning with what is become of the relationship between school districts and parents. The parents going to the school board meetings and speaking up that was very courageous in a time when things had become quite adversarial. It has not resulted in a change in that relationship. The school districts need to recognize that parental involvement is key to student success.

If that district wants to achieve what it is set out to do, which is educate children, it has to involve the parents in a non-confrontational in inclusive way.

Mr. MORAN. Switching gears one moment for a final question. You are not a medical doctor, but in your testimony, you highlighted that the education establishment's embrace of so-called gender affirming care is at odds with steps being taken in other countries to reduce or eliminate such interventions. Why are these practices so harmful and why is American medicine so out of step with other countries' approaches in this regard.

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, fortunately the State of Florida and specifically their Board of Medicine has taken a look at the evidence. They have done a systematic review of evidence and concluded that what is called gender affirming care is actually not helpful and, in fact, harmful to the often emotional vulnerable youth who are drawn into this system.

European nations are ahead of us in this process. Sweden's done a systematic review. The United Kingdom has as well, and the UK shut down their pediatric gender clinic as a result of the review, recognizing that it is harmful.

Mr. MORAN. Thank you for your answer today and thank you for your efforts on behalf of our children. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Moran. Mr. Bowman, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Mrs. Gentles, you mentioned the State of Florida in some of your remarks just then. Do you support the State of Florida's decision to remove AP African American History from its curriculum?

Mrs. GENTLES. That is not something that I have looked into and I do not think, from a Federal perspective, that Congress needs to get involved in what a State should or should not teach. I am not

sure if that is the role—that is not the role of the Federal Government.

Mr. BOWMAN. I am asking you your opinion. Do you support the teaching of African American History?

Mrs. GENTLES. Absolutely, I support the teaching of African American History. Fourth grade Social Studies in Virginia has a real emphasis for that.

Mr. BOWMAN. You, also—I am sorry. I am reclaiming my time. Do you support the teaching of Latino History?

Mrs. GENTLES. For sure, yes.

Mr. BOWMAN. You support the teaching of all history, multicultural history in every American school, you support that.

Mrs. GENTLES. Right. We need to have a robust and full history standards and lessons and curriculum so that all topics are addressed.

Mr. BOWMAN. Do you support the teaching of Queer and Gender Studies in public schools?

Mrs. GENTLES. I am not sure what you mean when you say Queer and Gender Studies. That does not sound like something that would be in elementary level, for example, appropriate topic.

Mr. BOWMAN. What about middle school and high school?

Mrs. GENTLES. Yes, I am not sure what you are saying when you are saying Queer and Gender Studies.

Mr. BOWMAN. I am a former educator. I worked in education for 20 years. I was a middle school principal for ten and a half years and I had students who identified as gay or lesbian or queer, and it was very important for them to feel safe and comfortable and seen and heard and recognized in our school curriculum and that helped them to have higher levels of self-esteem, self-worth, and it helped them to thrive academically, in my school. I am just wondering what your thoughts are about that. Do you support the teaching and supporting of Queer and Gender Studies in schools?

Mrs. GENTLES. I honestly am not familiar with a curriculum or a class that would be an appropriate class, Queer and Gender.

Mr. BOWMAN. What about authors and books? There are many books who are authored by authors who identify as Queer. Many of these books in Florida have been taken off of bookshelves, along with many other books. Do you support the removal of classroom libraries in Florida or in public schools across the country?

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, I am pretty contrary by nature, so when books like *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and other books were being brought up as controversial and I went out and ordered them to make sure that my daughters were not kept from reading them in their public schools. When you are talking about schools that specifically direct children to sex acts, sex Apps, or lay out—

Mr. BOWMAN. How many schools—resuming my time. I am sorry. How many schools have been identified as teaching this so-called or providing this so-called woken indoctrination agenda, how many schools?

Mrs. GENTLES. There are examples—

Mr. BOWMAN. Have you identified a number of schools that are so-called implementing a woke indoctrination agenda; is there a number?

Mrs. GENTLES. No. That might be something that the Committee could—

Mr. BOWMAN. There is no number.

Mrs. GENTLES [continuing]. Submit a report on, but there is anecdotal evidence.

Mr. BOWMAN. In your testimony you continued to make general statements about schools this, parents' that, teachers this, but you cannot tell me a number right now of schools that are implementing this sort of curriculum. Let me just reclaim my time.

In your testimony, you drew a contrast between balanced literacy and phonics. Can you talk to me about that contrast?

Mrs. GENTLES. Yes. Thank you for that question. Balance literacy refers to what is often called "queuing," which is a debunked approach to teaching reading that is taught students to guess.

Mr. BOWMAN. What is "queuing"?

Mrs. GENTLES. It teaches children to memorize words to guess the sentence based on the context. They look at pictures and they guess and skip over words that they are not familiar with. The contrast of that is phonics instructions, which helps children spell out and break down the building blocks—

Mr. BOWMAN. Okay. Let me just reclaim my time. As I mentioned, I taught in public schools for 20 years. I was an elementary school teacher. Phonics is a major component of balanced literacy. Balanced literacy includes the teaching of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and it also includes the teaching of phonics instruction. That is why it is called balanced. It is not separate from phonics instruction. Phonics instruction is supposed to be part of balanced literacy. It is important for you to know that. It is important for everyone on this panel to know that.

I just have a few more questions, while I do not have much time left, but I would like to go to Governor Polis. Can you talk a little bit about how to build a positive school culture?

Governor POLIS. In 10 seconds? Wow. Well, it really includes partnership with parents, first and foremost. We have heard this from both sides of the aisle. It needs to be implemented. In fact, great site leadership is so important and then bringing educators along with that vision for the school, including aligning curriculum to standards.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you and I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. Governor, you get a gold star. Mr. Williams, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Thank you, Madame Chairman. Governor, as the executive of a significant State, I really admire you for your investment here and your patience in dealing with all of these things. My wife is a native of Colorado from Fort Carson. There only briefly before her father was deployed to Vietnam. Just a little biographical comment is that my wife and I both homeschooled our children, though we are the product of excellent public education and have had significant further education, that was the best choice for us.

Sir, I commend you. You have been a consistent champion for school choice, and I very much applaud everything that you have done for the children of Colorado to ensure that a child's zip code is not the determinate factor of their quality of education.

I am personally saddened that school choice has become more partisan in recent years, although it looks like it is making a comeback. I am excited about that, but it really should not be a partisan issue. School choice is about giving every child a chance to succeed in life no matter their circumstances.

I did read your testimony in case you think all is lost or we do not pay attention. You say we cannot rely on the old ways of doing things. I just invite your comment, sir. Can you explain briefly for this Committee why you support school choice, and can you offer advice on how we, as Republican and Democrat, can come together on this issue. You have done this successfully, and I would like to learn.

Governor POLIS. I will give you an example of the way in Colorado Democrats and Republicans came together on school choice. We are home to over 400,000 Military families like the family your wife was born into. Many people get stationed to Colorado, including people with young kids at a different time of year than the traditional open enrollment season and so many of them were effectively excluded from the open enrollment process, had to enroll in their neighborhood school and many enrollments in their neighborhood school. That is a fine choice.

However, what we did through the State legislature, and I was able to sign the bill to do it, is we created a special open enrollment period, a different timeline for Military families that are assigned to Colorado so that they can have their school of choice for their child, the space permitting, of course.

We have open enrollment within school districts and across school districts in Colorado. We also try to learn from schools that have a lot of demand and therefore need to have lotteries. We are saying what are they doing well, how do we expand or replicate that? Some of them are district schools, some of them are charter schools. It is not about the model of the school. It is about the quality, and it is about the educational outcomes.

Finally, I would point out that what is good for one kid is not necessarily good for another. I have two kids. Many on this Committee have different kids and you know that many kids have different learning styles. Some might want a hands-on outdoor experiential add model. Some might want a more rigorous college prep model. Some might benefit from additional vocational or hands-on ways of learning. While every possible model is not necessarily available to every kid, we want to make sure that more kids across our State can access the education that works for them.

Mr. WILLIAMS. If I may, just to followup, the model that has been talked about from a governance standpoint, governing standpoint, and because you obviously have a very large responsibility in the education in your State, I have seen that the resources should follow the child, instead of the institution in funding a child's education as a focus rather than a system.

A lot of things you mentioned really talk about enrollment in the public schools with some flexibility for charter. I think back to our own experience of extending that to parochial schools to homeschooling, which was the right choice for our family. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions along those lines?

Governor POLIS. We do have many school districts and charter schools that partner with and support homeschooling families. I think what is missing from some of these models like the Arizona model that has been touted on this panel, is the quality and accountability. How do we know it is working if we do not know there is student achievement? How do we make sure that if there are taxpayer resources being used, that there is quality? There needs to be some way of doing that, some structure for doing that, some accountability for doing that, some transparency into that, because these are public funds.

Certainly, we want to make sure that we can innovate with homeschools, with other kinds of schools to make sure that as long as they are willing to have the transparency that accompanies public funds there's a way to incorporate the innovation they bring.

Mr. WILLIAMS. Respectfully, just for the last 10 seconds, we homeschooled in four different jurisdictions, Washington State, briefly in Florida, New York State, and New York City, which, of course, is its own. Our son is a senior at Georgia Tech in Aerospace Engineering, so homeschooling did work in our case. Thank you for your comments, sir.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. Mr. Mrvan, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MRVAN. Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx. I would like to thank the panel for being here today. Governor Polis, I am from Indiana, northwest Indiana, and my daughter is a sophomore and she went through the Explore, Engage, Experience Grant and came home and said she wants to be a lawyer so she could afford what she likes. I bring that up because that experience that you mentioned is something that makes them think about what they want to do when they grow up and I appreciate you mentioning that from being from the State of Indiana.

Very quickly, realizing the key to successful economic development is an educated workforce, very often in the most vulnerable populations becomes challenges and hurdles, such as childcare, such as transportation, such as dependent care, and housing. They are significant barriers or challenges to employment.

However, these services provided by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the WIOA, as we know it, allow the workers to receive job training and create paths of their choosing toward economic stability. My question to you is what impacts do these services have on training programs completion and employer retention.

Governor POLIS. Yes. The flexibility within WIOA to be able to support these wraparound services is critical. To be clear, it is not transportation for the sake of transportation. It is not childcare for the sake of childcare. It is directly related to the ability to become part of the workforce.

We traditionally focused the money on the skills piece and obviously that is a relevant piece, the need of the skills. If you have the skills, but your reality is you are the caregiver for a child during the day hours where you want to be working or you do not have a car and there is not a bus route to get to work, how can we be flexible enough with WIOA where we can make sure that person is able to work and support themselves and address the barriers that they have in their own life.

Mr. MRVAN. I was a former Township Trustee, to get to the point, we managed the most vulnerable populations. In order to give them a lift up, we were able to provide transportation through a bus service. We were able to provide childcare, so I commend you.

One of my questions that I think is a key component is how in education did you utilize the American Rescue Plan dollars to most maximize what was going on in education?

Governor POLIS. Lots of different ways. The ESSER and the GEER funds are two of those. I would say across the State, making sure that we could reduce and address the learning loss a lot of this was decentralized in districts and schools were able to innovate as they should. Many of them included extended learning days, additional hours of support. We are looking at directing additional State dollars to afterschool Math support as an example for kids who are struggling in Math.

Free summer clinics—many school districts in the past either had to charge for or had very limited ability to offer free slots for academic tutoring in the summer. Many districts leaned into that last summer and are planning the same for this summer to help make sure that students are caught up for success. Supporting innovative programs through GEAR that broke down barriers between community colleges, school districts, and workforce. An example, in the San Louis Valley a number of school districts worked with out-of-State college in the area to provide transferable and aligned dual and concurrent enrollment credit in many of the rural districts that surround the college.

Mr. MRVAN. Thank you. Dr. Sullivan, you talked about workforce development and engagement in community college, and short-term college programs that allow entrance into the workforce. Can you just share with me some success stories of industry in those colleges and those programs working together in order to have the outcomes of people getting into the workforce quickly?

Dr. SULLIVAN. Sure. Great example, first of all, commend the State of Indiana for the Ivy Tech. Great work that is going on there. One of the Nation's best community and technical college systems, so I know you have a great deal to be proud of.

Mr. MRVAN. I will share that with them. Thank you.

Dr. SULLIVAN. Thank you. Just as a broad statement, I know many of you are aware of the broadband initiatives that are going on around this country trying to establish broadband for the people of this country. Someone has to lay that broadband. Someone has to lay the fiber. We are in the midst of what has been now about a 10-week process of developing curriculum of working with folks within the industry to identify the skills needed and to help those individuals to become certified. Companies like right there—Louisiana Delta Community College in the northeast part of the State who is working with Ethridge Pipeline and Conduit.

These folks are coming onto the campus, bringing equipment, bringing expertise to teach individuals. We are forecasting about 2,000 graduates by the end of this current year within the broadband space to help ensure that we have the people necessary. That we are not asking folks from Indiana to come to Louisiana to install fiber, but instead, that we are able to do that work ourselves.

Mr. MRVAN. Thank you, Dr. Sullivan. I was proud to vote for the infrastructure bill that allowed for that fiber to be laid, which created jobs to open the gates for education. I thank you very much for all your participation today. Thank you.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Mrvan. Ms. Houchin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOUCHIN. Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. I am really glad to talk about this subject matter today. I am glad that our first Full Committee hearing is focused on such an important issue or such important issues. Dr. Foxx said in her opening remarks, this could not be more rewarding work than looking out for the interest of students.

Mrs. Gentles, my first question is for you. I really appreciated your written testimony. I took particular interest in your discussion of literacy. My son is dyslexic. Many of our colleagues have children with dyslexia or other reading disabilities, so I have worked on this issue very closely in the State of Indiana as a legislator.

You note the problematic use of balance literacy. I appreciate your mention of the book by Emily Hanford told a story how teaching kids to read went so wrong and I have experienced that firsthand, both as a mom and a legislator. We are making progress toward a more phonics-based instruction. I am really glad of that, but I do know firsthand how hard it is to turn the bureaucratic barge.

In the State of Indiana, we fought the Department of Education to implement a screening for students with dyslexia and implementing reading specialists in the schools who have an understanding of the issue and how to teach kids to read.

We have seen maybe a failure of what I would call the education industrial complex in this space. Reading scores are not just keeping pace. They are declining and they have since we changed our methodology. What more can we be doing at the Federal level to encourage this transition to phonics-based instruction and bridge the gap, particularly in the higher education space.

Mrs. GENTLES. Right. You mentioned reading scores going down. Eighth grade Math scores got a lot of attention from me, but it should be noted that a third of fourth graders are below basic in Reading and 30 percent of eighth graders are below basic. Below basic is appalling and so keeping attention to where those scores are dropping, but then shining a light on where they went up. Where are the success stories? Colorado is one of them when it comes to Reading and ensuring that this transition over to a more appropriate approach is happening in Mississippi is a great success story.

I think here at the Committee you can shine the light, bring the leaders and the people who have implemented reading instruction and approaches to setting curriculum standards at the State level and implementing them at the district level here so that people can know those models and follow them.

Ms. HOUCHIN. That is great. I would like to know, when we are talking about learning losses, as a parent of a child with an IEP, COVID, learning losses, all students were impacted, but no more than studies with disabilities on IEPs. We did not have specialized training to teach our children. I am not trained in the methodolo-

gies that help students with dyslexia, so that is something that will continue to have to strive to overcome.

I do, Madame Chair, I would like to highlight that the students that have dyslexia and the Dyslexia Institute of Indiana reached out to me regarding strong support for a phonics-based approach and I would like to submit a brief statement to the record by the Dyslexia Institute of Indiana that they provided to my office.

Chairwoman FOXX. Without objection.

Ms. HOUCHIN. Thank you.

[The information of Ms. Houchin follows:]

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BY THE DYSLEXIA INSTITUTE OF INDIANA

“The Dyslexia Institute of Indiana is a strong proponent for using a structured literacy approach for reading that aligns with the Science of Reading. In the 34 years of our existence, we have had success teaching students to read and spell using the Orton-Gillingham approach to phonics and phonics based skills. This multisensory approach uses direct and explicit instruction to help students retain reading skills, which in turn brings them closer to automaticity and fluency. This approach is appropriate for all students who are learning to read and not just dyslexic students.”—Dyslexia Institute of Indiana

Ms. HOUCHIN. A couple of things. I want to switch to Mr. Sullivan. I did have the opportunity to visit with Ivy Tech yesterday. Certainly, we are very proud of their presence in southern Indiana in my district. One of the things we talk about is the record number of job openings and the lower workforce participation rate and what we can do to increase that.

Ivy Tech is working on increasing and drilling down on what high-skilled certifications are necessary so that high-value, industry-based certification. What is the single greatest barrier, in your opinion, to those types of credentials?

Mr. SULLIVAN. Well, thank you for the question. First of all, I would say to you they are high-cost programs, which is one of the key areas. They are also programs that are difficult to identify faculty for because they are typically the more skilled individuals and so there are a number of challenges, but I want to be really clear of what you just said. Information is powerful. If you have the ability to point out a sector that is a growth sector in Louisiana, as an example, the cyber security space is a growth area, as I am sure it is in many states around the union.

As we begin to develop those programs, as we deliver those programs to ensure we have the workforce there, I will simply point out that our students are voting with their feet. Time is the enemy.

One other point that I cannot help but point out here. This nation has millions of adults who do not have a high school diploma. As we sit today and talk about K–12 education, how in the world can parents be informed about their K–12 education of their child when they do not have an education themselves? In the WIOA Act, adult basic education has been second fiddle for far too long.

We are not serving the needs of adult students through WIOA through adult basic education at the level that we need to. It is about skills. Yes, the high school diploma and equivalency is important, but we must find a way to put skills in front of these individuals so that they have the ability to get into the economy and to produce for their families.

Ms. HOUCHIN. I could not agree more. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. Ms. Stevens.

Ms. STEVENS. Thank you, Madame Chair. It is evident we have three great community college systems represented here today. LCTCC, we are very proud of your background, Dr. Sullivan. Ivy Tech, which I have gotten to know from my time in workforce development. Oakland Community College in Michigan, it is community college week in Washington, DC, and folks are talking about the skills gap.

Now, in the 116th Congress, we introduced the College Affordability Act as a democratic majority, which included the expanded programs. I was just outside talking to our community college friends from Michigan about this. Dr. Sullivan, I was wondering if you could extrapolate on this opportunity of expanding PELL for some of the short-term work programs to get people into skills and employment opportunities?

Dr. SULLIVAN. First of all, thank you for the question. This is an area where it is clear that we have bipartisan support. When you think about the number of individuals stranded in this economy, 60 million individuals who do not have the skills needed in order to be able to get that first job, we have a point-in-time opportunity to change the trajectory of millions of Americans and ensure that they get back into the economy.

When you think about being down 5 percentage points workforce participation, think of the millions of people that are impacted. Think of the millions of young people that are impacted. I would say to you this, the best teaching for young people is to watch their parents. Let us give those parents an opportunity to be educated and skilled at a level that allows them to provide for their children and their family. That is the greatest education a young person can see.

Ms. STEVENS. Well, this is a great action item for us in the 118th Congress and a way to come together. As we talk about the American Education in Crisis, we know that our waivers for free and reduced lunch that were expanded during the pandemic have expired and we have 10 million students at risk of going hungry.

My father was a public-school teacher and often brought culinary into his classroom to meet those needs. We know that 96 percent of school systems in this country are now saying that they are experiencing debt. Obviously, Mrs. Gentles, I note in your testimony you had a brief section talking about the worsening school climate and I was just wondering if you could validate that not having the moneys for schools to provide free and reduced lunch is contributing to that worsening school climate?

Mrs. GENTLES. I am not sure what you are talking about. I apologize as far as not having—

Ms. STEVENS. You are not sure what I am talking about regarding providing free and reduced lunch, and the fact that we do not have waivers, and schools are incurring debt as a result? It has been in the news a lot.

Mrs. GENTLES. The fact that schools are going into debt because they do not have their free and reduced-price lunch funding. No, I am sorry. I am not familiar with that.

Ms. STEVENS. Well, we would be happy to exchange with you on that. Certainly, I know in your brief section in your testimony dedicated to the worsening school climate one would oblige that not having the moneys to provide lunches.

Which Mr. Polis, our great Governor of Colorado, you have implemented some tremendous programs for the pandemic relief and for providing free and reduced lunch and I was wondering if you could share with us specifically some of the results that you are seeing in Colorado.

Governor POLIS. Yes. Of course, we, like most states, took advantage of the extended free lunch during the pandemic. We now have chosen, starting next fall, to move forward with free lunch for everybody and free breakfast as well. What that means is, of course, it is optional. Some parents want to pack lunch. That is fine. Removes any stigma associated with school lunch and frankly reduces a lot of paperwork and overhead associated with who pays what and who does what. It makes it a lot easier, freeing up school resources to be used on teacher pay and classroom instruction.

First and foremost, making schools have the—kids have the nutrition they need to succeed if they do not get those healthy meals at home, reducing overhead and bureaucratic waste, and saving families money on lunches.

Ms. STEVENS. You have a ballot measure cooking to alleviate the burden of filling out school meal applications and to assure that no child falls through the cracks. This is something that we hear a lot, the stigma, the shame. Could you speak about that ballot measure?

Governor POLIS. With the free lunches? Yes. There are no longer any forms associated with it, which had always been an issue, especially for non-English-speaking families, for families that value their privacy. You know all these sorts of nosy government questions just to get the lunch. You no longer have to answer those. It would be either lunch provided to everybody. If you want to take advantage of it, you can. There is no check card you need. There is no stigma associated with it and it will save every family who wants to participate in that the cost of school lunch.

Ms. STEVENS. Feed our kids, educate America. Thank you, Madame Chair. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. Mr. Grothman, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Pulsipher, western Governors deliver an education through competency-based education model. I would like you to elaborate that a little bit and see what we can do to amend the Higher Ed Act to accommodate that or your opinion of the benefits of it.

Mr. PULSIPHER. Sure. You know over a century ago we kind established and codified a credit hour into our system of higher education and something that started really as a way for faculty to accrue hours and get paid became somehow a measure of learning.

Well, competency-based takes a very different approach, which is it tries to keep the standard for learning, meaning the proficiency against a particular learning outcome like that is actually what determines that you have developed the competency that is necessary to complete the course.

When you design around that model, it allows a couple things that I will just highlight. First and foremost, it allows you to more directly align the learning outcomes with the work and that which they need to be readied for. Second, it actually allows you personalized learning, such that an individual can leverage that which they may already be quite skilled in and can move quite quickly through that, and they can dedicate more time and attention to the things that they need to focus on, and may have less preparedness in. At the end of the day, what you can determine with a competency-based approach is that every individual has been assessed and validated proficient against those learning outcomes.

The last thing I would say on this, Representative Grothman, is that competency-based education is not new. If you talk about any licensure area, in medicine, in law, in the practice of nursing, even in accountancy, all these individuals have to meet proficiency standards. Well, the same can apply in higher education as a practice.

Mr. GROTHMAN. It would seem to make common sense that you would focus more on people—on what people know and how long they have been sitting at a desk; does it seem that way?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Yes. It certainly seems—I often like to say that virtually every one of us who may have gone to a conventional model already personally experienced competence-based education. You can think of that course where you realized that I did not need to sit through all the lectures, but I had to wait until the end of the term to take the final.

What competency-based education allows is that individual, when they actually are ready, and can take their assessments and pass those assessments, they are done with that course, and they can progress. We have seen that, one, increase the personalization. Two, it also reduces the time that students need to acquire their degree.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Save some costs too, right?

Mr. PULSIPHER. A lot of cost when a bachelor's candidate can finish their degree program in two and a half years versus four, you are significantly reducing the cost to attain the credential they need.

Mr. GROTHMAN. We will switch over here to Virginia Gentles. There are some numbers before me here that even I am shocked at and I do not think I could be shocked. It says here among English teachers there are 97 Democrats for every 3 Republicans and among health teachers 99 Democrats for every Republican. I think it is accurate to say in this country we are divided about 50/50, right, every Presidential election, maybe 51/49 or something. Overall, 87 Democrats for every 13 Republicans.

I am not a big one on all this diversity stuff, but I do think, say when you are picking out novels for kids to read and novels a lot of times have a message in them, you would expect about 50/50 as far as English teachers, History teachers, what have you, but it is not that way at all. I think that is one of the major reasons why there is such a lack of support for education today among some people. Could you comment on that a little bit as to how this happens and what we can do to turn it around and can we ever be con-

sidered to getting a holistic education if we have so many teachers on one side of the ideological spectrum to even have a good school.

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, I am a product of public education, K through 12, growing up in Florida and I am happy to say I have absolutely no idea what the partisan affiliation of any single teacher that I had growing up. I think one solution would be to create an emphasis in the classroom on academics rather than on activism and ensure that teachers are reminded that it is not appropriate to bring in their partisan approach to the classroom.

Another approach would be to make the teaching profession welcoming to people of all different political persuasions.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I do not mean to cut you off. To me, the problem is even if you say you are being non-ideological every novel has a message in it, right? If you are a hardcore Democrat, you want to give the kids a different message than more of a traditional person. What can we do to get back to 50/50? When I went to college, by the way, I remember—you can tell how old I am. I would say half the teachers in the school had Join McGovern buttons on, so I know what was going on there.

Yes, can you think of any way we can get back to say in English literature about a 50/50 split here.

Mrs. GENTLES. Again, I think that the teaching profession needs to be welcoming to people of all different perspectives. When you have the environment right now that encourages teachers to keep secrets from parents there are people of maybe a more conservative persuasion that are not comfortable with that and they are not going to want to stay in the teaching profession or join the profession. Perhaps if the profession is more inclusive of a wide range of values and includes more conservative values there either might be more of a balance.

Chairwoman FOXX. The gentleman's time has expired. Ms. Manning, you are recognized.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Madame Chair. I want to associate myself with the earlier remarks of my colleague, Mr. Takano. It is concerning that extremists are being given a platform in the Congress of the United States to spread misinformation and disinformation by citing antidotal incidence or by citing their own articles of evidence to back up their misinformation about what is going on, in general, in our schools.

This is a serious body that has important work to do for the American people and America's children. We have real issues to deal with and that is what my constituents sent me here to address. I do appreciate the focus and discussion today about the critically important issue of apprenticeship programs and technical training programs in community colleges. These types of educational opportunities are particularly critical to my district where we are now seeing the growth of good-paying jobs in advanced manufacturing that require education beyond high school.

Governor Polis, the Public Workforce Development Systems can only be successful if employees see value in engaging with these systems. Given your experience working with employers in your State, do you think the Workforce Systems are providing value to employers and are their key areas that need to be strengthened?

Governor POLIS. Applaud the work of Careerwise now helping to link the employer side in Colorado and several other states. We, as a State, see value in this and I believe in putting our money where our mouth is, meaning we, ourselves, as a State we have now partnered with apprenticeship in several of our State agencies to be able to make sure that we can benefit from the work of individuals who are getting an education while they do it.

We see the benefit. So many private sector employers across our State increasing numbers—I am happy to submit the list of participating employers to the Committee—are seeing the benefit because when I talk to CEOs, chief H.R. officers in many of the major employers in our State the No. 1 issue they bring up is always how do we attract and retain the talent we need to succeed? They see apprenticeships and these kinds of models as a key strategy of achieving their own goals of making sure they can track and retain the people they need to continue their success.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. Are there ways you think employers could do more to support workers, especially those with barriers to employment in lifelong learning?

Governor POLIS. I think now is an excellent time to have that conversation because more than ever employers are really looking and thinking out of the box about how they can meet their workforce needs. In Colorado, we have two jobs that are open for every unemployed person, and I know there are many jurisdictions across the country, that have a similar dilemma. Now is the time to really convene, as we have in Colorado, many of the key employers. That means at the county level, it means at the State level, at the regional level, and really talk about how we could improve the pipeline of talent to further their success.

We are looking at aligning our workforce dollars, some of which are ARPA dollars, with meeting the needs of the growing private sector in our State.

Ms. MANNING. I met with one of the leaders of one of our great community colleges just yesterday and talked to her about what we can do to get more older students, students with families back into the system. She talked about needs, including childcare, transportation, nutritional benefits, and mental health issues.

Unfortunately, some across the aisle feel that these investments should be cut. You noted in your testimony that wraparound services are a part of Colorado's investments in the workforce. Do you feel that these services have increased retention and increased the number of people who can come into these workforce development programs?

Governor POLIS. Without a doubt, making sure that people can get to workforce training programs helps improve participation for those for whom transportation was a barrier that they could not overcome on their own. We are also partnering with our community colleges and colleges to provide additional onsite childcare opportunities.

By the way, that benefits their workforce as well as the students. Both for attracting and retaining the support staff they need as an institution as well as for the students, the availability of lower-cost onsite daycare is critical.

Ms. MANNING. That is great to hear. I am going to stick with you, and I am going to ask you one more question and that is about one of the real crises in our schools and that is youth mental health. You noted in your testimony that Colorado is expanding mental health support for students and offering free therapy sessions with mental health professionals.

As your administration has begun implementing these programs, have you seen an impact on student populations?

Governor POLIS. Yes. The demand has been huge. Getting the word out, particularly, for students who otherwise have barriers to access. That can be geographic, it can be a rural area, it can be a cultural or familial barrier where they do not know where to go or who to ask for help and really making it easy and convenient has absolutely help lead to improved learning outcomes as well as helped make sure that we have a safer State.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. I am not sure if I am going to get a gold star, but I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. I told you we are working on some kind of recognition to you. Mr. Bean, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEAN. Thank you very much, Dr. Foxx. Good afternoon to you and good afternoon to the Education and Workforce Committee. It is good to see everybody. Dr. Foxx, I am going to give you a gold star because you have shined the spotlight on a crisis. It is in education.

I come from the free State of Florida where I have served 10 years on the frontlines of legislating ways to improve education, empower parents, and really focus on results. Some of the legislation has been talked about in the Committee, and I am going to talk about it back to let you know the real story of what we have done in the State of Florida.

Now, do not trust me. Go look at our state's report card, or you can look at parents who have voted with their feet to come to the State of Florida with the reason being they wanted their kids back in school. That is what they wanted. In the free State of Florida, what we discovered is education and kids do better when there is live instruction. They do better when schools are open. They do better when parents are involved and empowered. They do better, as Governor Polis said, when there is choice, because all kids are, in fact, different. They also do better when there is more time focused on the things that matter.

A couple of the legislation bills that were talked about is the so-called Don't Say Gay bill, which has nothing to do with anything about gay or anything the other opponents want to say about it. What it does say, and I wish I could name the bill. In fact, let us do it right now. There is a new name for that bill and it is called Let Kids be Kids bill because there is no reason whatsoever that we should be teaching sex or any of the—we should not be teaching sex to kindergarteners, first, second, third graders. That is what that bill says. Let us teach age-appropriate things.

Hey, let us teach things—subjects that matter, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic. The so-called CRT, we have said no in the State of Florida, no to CRT. There is no value. There is no value to teach kids to hate each other based on race. There is no value in teaching kids to feel guilty just because they are of a certain race or persua-

sion. Let us teach them—here is a novel idea. Let us teach them Reading or Math or Science.

My first question—and I have got questions for every single one of you. That is, Mrs. Gentles, what can we do—and this is new to me on a Federal level because this is—the action is at the states, but what can we do on a Federal level to help states, like the free State of Florida, better their education system?

Mrs. GENTLES. Well, we certainly need to celebrate states like Florida, who were success stories when it came to the NAEP scores and success stories for keeping schools open and ensuring that academics are at the center.

A big thing that the Committee can do is support school choice legislation that does happen at the Federal level for states who are very different than Florida and do not have an array of options. Ensuring that charter school programs receive sufficient funding, taking a look at that education tax credit program that would provide options for students in states that do not have robust choice programs. That is definitely something that can be done at the Federal level.

Then again, reminding parents of their rights under PPRA, under FERPA, ensuring that states and districts are not lying to parents about what Title IX does and does not do. That should be something that the Committee could do.

Mr. BEAN. Mrs. Gentles, thank you so much. That is the right answer, the answer that I was hoping for to continue to push states. I am running out of time. I have got a question for everybody. Let us make it a multiple-choice, toss-up question for everybody and that is it. I am thinking about a bill, our last meeting, our roundtable was Dr. Foxx did a focus on the disaster we call the Student Loan Program. How can we fix it? My thought is, what if we did a bill that said a college has to cosign for the loan so colleges are involved whether that loan is made. Is that a good idea, a bad idea, or an idea worth exploring, Mr. Pulsipher?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you for that question. I think that there certainly are ways by which if you increase institutional accountability or risk sharing in the cost of attaining a degree that would increase the incentive to control the cost of attaining a degree.

Mr. BEAN. Good idea. Thank you. Governor Polis, good idea, worth exploring? Hurry.

Governor POLIS. Hello, from the free State of Colorado. Aligning incentives to outcomes, there is a lot in Mr. Pulsipher's testimony about that and I generally agree with the directions that he indicated in his testimony.

Mr. BEAN. Good idea. Thank you so much.

Dr. Sullivan.

Dr. SULLIVAN. Not a big student loan participants in terms of our students because our price point is relatively low. I would say to you we already have Title IV provisions that require institutions to be partners in the form of Return to Title IV. I would suggest to you it is probably not a bad idea.

Mr. BEAN. Thank you. Yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you very much. Ms. Wild, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. I am not sure I am going to get a gold star here, but I am going to try. I was encouraged when I read the testimonies of the witnesses getting ready for this hearing because I found a number of points of agreement with each of you. In fact, much of this hearing has addressed points of agreement, but there are a few areas that I really need to hone in on.

I want to make a couple of observations at the outset. Here I am as almost the last witness or the last person to question, so I have heard a lot in the course of this hearing and my observations, first of all, to my colleague and to anybody who believes otherwise, CRT, otherwise known as Critical Race Theory, is not taught in the K to 12 schools, ever. This is a talking point that has been used by the opposition party to try to inflame parents and people and it is simple not done. We need to stop talking about it.

No. 2, there is a reference in at least one testimony to cruel COVID-era closures of schools. I would like to point out that the COVID-era closure of schools started under President Trump, and I am not suggesting that it was inappropriate, but this seems to be something that is consistently blamed on the Biden Administration and Democrats and it is very important to note that the schools were closed in roughly March 2020 when President Trump was still President.

Third, I have heard a lot of comments about teachers and teacher unions. I have read a lot about in the testimony almost suggesting that they are the root of all problems in our schools. It was refreshing when we were going through COVID and so many of these kids were learning at home online. It was so refreshing to hear parents say now I really appreciate my kids' teachers because they understood just what a challenge it is to teach. Those are my observations.

Onto the points of agreement, Dr. Sullivan, I agree with your testimony that PELL needs to be expanded to include workforce programs. Mr. Pulsipher, I agree that Higher Ed must meet the needs of the workforce and that Higher Ed must create value for the students and Higher Ed must be accessible, transferable, and equitable. I just want you to know all the things I agree with you on.

Mrs. Gentles, I agree with you that far too many forces within the education system insist on prioritizing the promotion of ideologies over academic instruction. I agree with you that we need oversight and accountability of emergency Federal funding to schools, and I think the Biden Administration is actually doing that oversight and accountability of those funds. I agree with you that far too many classrooms are chaotic and sorely in need of programs that support mental health and discipline.

We do disagree, however, on where these ideologies that you spoke of are coming from. I will start by talking about the effort to ban books in public school districts across our country. We have heard from Pan America that 138 school districts across 32 states banned books from the Summer of 2021 to the Summer of 2022. These bans affected 4 million students nationwide.

Forty-one percent of the banned books over this time period featured LGBT themes or characters, 40 percent featured characters of color, 21 percent dealt with issues of race and racism. Do you

believe that all those books in those categories should be banned? That is just a yes or no question.

Mrs. GENTLES. No, I am not a supporter of book bans.

Ms. WILD. Okay. Good, then you probably would agree with me then that this nationwide movement to prohibit students from reading certain books is an attempt at ideological indoctrination in our public education system, which was exactly what your testimony did not want to see?

Mrs. GENTLES. I would want to point out that the books that are being brought up and questioned, not banned, but questioned are generally of very sexually explicit in nature, regardless of the other themes, and the focus or the main characters in those books, the sexual explicit nature of the books, particularly, when you are talking about graphic novels that are aimed at younger, emerging readers, those are the primary concern.

Ms. WILD. I think we could probably agree that sexually explicit materials should not be given to young elementary school students. Can we agree that it is important with older students to teach the skill of critical thinking?

Mrs. GENTLES. We absolutely agree that critical thinking is important.

Ms. WILD. Okay. Meaning the ability to look at a situation, weigh the evidence, look at the trustworthiness of a source, particularly now with rampant social media that spreads all kinds of things, and arrive at a person's own conclusions based on the evidence. You like that idea?

Mrs. GENTLES. Absolutely.

Ms. WILD. Okay. This is best done by exposing people, and I am not talking about four and 5-year-old, this is best done by exposing people to exposing people to different ideas, teaching them about the sources, and letting them evaluate the evidence. True?

Mrs. GENTLES. Yes.

Ms. WILD. Okay. In general, would you—

Chairwoman FOXX. Your time has expired.

Ms. WILD. Yes. I told you I was not going to get a gold star. Thank you. I yield.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. I am going to give Mr. Kiley a gold star for being here and being so patient today, because he has sat through this entire hearing waiting to be—oh, Ms. Hayes too. Okay.

Mr. KILEY. Happy to share the gold star.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. You are recognized.

Mr. KILEY. Governor Polis, thanks very much for being here today. I believe you are the founder of a charter school yourself, is that right?

Governor POLIS. That is correct, two.

Mr. KILEY. Two charter schools and you have been a strong supporter of charters in Colorado. As you know, after President Biden took office the Administration almost immediately set out to target charter schools with proposed rules that, as you put it, would "gut the Federal charter schools' program." You wrote a letter to Secretary Cardona, in which you said you strongly oppose the Department of Education's proposed new rules.

Now, I have to say, when you were asked about this earlier you seemed to hedge a little bit by saying that while different states have different authorizing laws, there was no hedging in this letter. You celebrated the national impact of charter schools. You wrote “Around the country public charter schools are making a difference in students’ lives. During the 2020/2021 school year, nearly 240,000 new students enrolled in charter schools across the country.”

You also wrote in this letter “It is confounding and deeply disturbing that the Department of Education would even want to consider making the opening of high-quality charter schools considerably more difficult than ever before. Our students need more public school options and high-quality charter schools play a critical role in providing that access.”

I do not want to put you in a tough spot. I am coming at this from someone who is very interested in bipartisan education. I am a former high school teacher myself, very interested in working on a bipartisan basis to expand educational opportunity, to expand high-quality public school options, to close achievement gaps, and I have now found some partners on the other side of the aisle. I hope to have the chance to collaborate with you as well.

I have to say it has been few and far between with many in your party, it is like running into a brick wall. The only interest they have in charters is how to harass them, how to target them, how to get rid of them. In my State, California, the Governor and super majority have been condemned time and time again by Civil Rights groups for their relentless attacks on charter schools.

You are the chosen witness here of the minority at today’s hearing. I just wanted to get your help in understanding why do you think so many elected officials in your party are hospital to charter schools?

Governor POLIS. Well, I do not think that—I do not see charter schools as a partisan issue. In our State, about 15.2 percent of kids who go to public schools go to attend a public charter school. I founded a charter school for new immigrants and English language learners and one for kids who were experiencing insecurity in housing.

Again, I was pleased with the final rule. Again, while I did not think the rule was necessary from the Department of Education, it did incorporate many of the changes that I suggested, that others suggested involving charter schools. This is around a funding stream that specifically supports new charter schools and it is very important. I helped write some of the legislation when I was here around that piece of the Every Student Succeeds Act and it is really important to support innovation. I think it is a high return investment. It is a small dollar amount, high return.

It is also important to note that every idea is going to work out and that is Okay, just as every charter school does not work out, every new district initiative does not work out, but if you are not trying to do something different, then you are doing things the same way.

Mr. KILEY. I am sorry. My time is limited, so I just want to get back to the question.

Governor POLIS. Sure.

Mr. KILEY. It has become a partisan issue as this Administration almost immediately went after charter schools. As you well know, the opposition of charter schools largely comes from the other side of the dais. We have heard some comments today. I want to get your thoughts on this. Why has it become a partisan issue? I agree with you, it should not be.

Governor POLIS. Well, again, President Obama was very supportive of high-quality charter schools. I have every reason to believe the Biden Administration is also supportive of high-quality charter schools that improve equity and access. I think what they are pointing out, and again, I do not always agree with everything that they have said, they are more concerned about the equity and access piece. I think it is complicated how charter schools affect equity and access. It depends on the particular charter school, depends on the attendance, depends on the recruitment.

Yes, some states and some school districts have better or worse authorizing laws than others. We are proud of our authorizing laws in Colorado, and we hope to improve them even more.

Mr. KILEY. Do you have any other theories as to why it is that in some states we have overwhelming opposition to charters from one side of the aisle?

Governor POLIS. Well, there are certainly states that have worse charter authorizing laws. Frankly, they have had some negative experiences with charters that we have not seen in Colorado. In Colorado, we have seen them as a very constructive, innovative part of public education, and there is enormous demand for differentiated programs. By the way, districts have learned from practices in charter schools and districts have improved and offered new programming in district schools as well.

Mr. KILEY. Well, thank you. I appreciate your commitment to doing the right thing for students, and I would encourage you to have conversations with some who are less willing to take that same approach.

Chairwoman FOXX. All right. Thank you very much. Ms. Omar, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you, Chairwoman. I wanted to enter this article into the record from the Florida Phoenix. I know the gentleman is no longer here, but he was—

Chairwoman FOXX. Without objection.

Ms. OMAR. Thank you.

[The information of Ms. Omar follows:]

OMAR - For the record

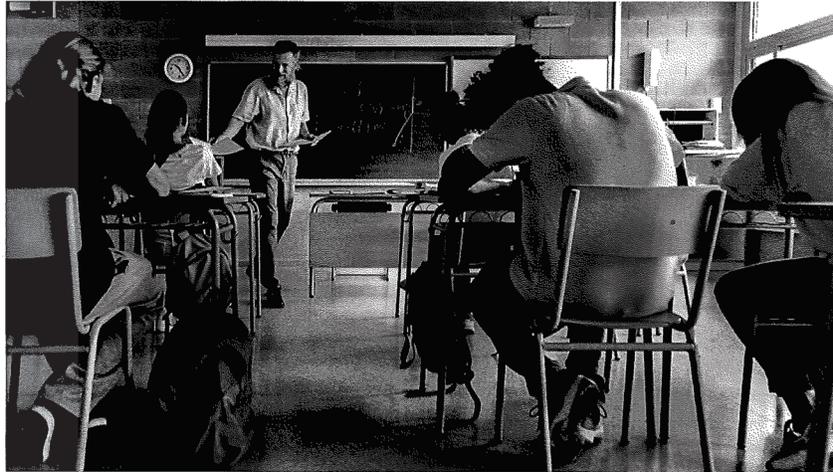


COVID-19 EDUCATION ELECTION 2022 POLITICS & LAW

Nation's report card: Alarming, appalling losses in reading, math scores; FL kids not proficient

Disappointing test scores in 4th and 8th grades could cast clouds over Monday's debate between DeSantis and Crist

BY: DANIELLE J. BROWN - OCTOBER 24, 2022 6:21 PM



Classroom. Credit: Getty Images

A large majority of Florida eighth graders do not read proficiently and struggle with 8th grade-level math skills, according to a nationwide assessment of students in 2022 – an uncomfortable reality for teens unprepared for a rigorous high school schedule.

A large portion of Florida's fourth graders also struggled with math and reading skills – though they performed higher than the national average. Still, they were unable to reach

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proficiency in those key subjects, according to 2022 data released Monday on the cusp of midterm elections.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and Democrat Charlie Crist will be debating Monday evening, and the sliding test scores could cast clouds on the education picture in Florida.

The results are a part of the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, also referred to as NAEP scores or the Nation's Report Card, which assesses subjects such as math and reading across the country using a sampling in specific grades.

The national outlook shows declines in reading and math scores among a sampling of the nation's 4th and 8th graders, highlighting the longstanding impacts of learning during the COVID pandemic.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush, who chairs the non-profit ExcelinEd, responded to the "alarming" national results, according to a Monday press release.

"Every child has the God-given ability to reach their full potential, and today's NAEP scores tell us the system failed our nation's children," Bush said.

"I'm optimistic we can overcome this educational crisis by leaning into this challenge. This is a national priority and a human necessity to ensure all students are provided the skills and knowledge to live a life of purpose."

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona called the national results "appalling, unacceptable, and a reminder of the impact that this pandemic has had on our learners," in a written statement Monday.

"The data also represent a call to action for the important work we must do now for our students—especially those who have suffered the most during the pandemic," Cardona added.

The DeSantis administration was quick to paint a brighter picture of the NAEP results on Monday, focusing on 4th grade reading and writing scores among subgroups of students such as students with disabilities, Black and Hispanic students, and children in school lunch programs.

He also propped up his controversial quick reopening of in-person learning. (DeSantis had initially closed schools earlier in the pandemic.)

"We also knew that younger and at-risk students would be the most impacted if schools were closed, and the results speak for themselves," DeSantis said in a written statement.

His Democratic opponent Charlie Crist, who was a former Republican Education Commissioner, has so far not formally commented on the results of the NAEP scores for Florida, but it's possible that the issue may be addressed as a question in Monday's televised debate between the two candidates.

Here's what these results say overall.

8th graders

The NAEP national results were collected from January through March, among some 224,000 4th grade students from approximately 5,700 schools and 222,000 8th grade students from approximately 5,100 schools.

For 8th graders across the country, the average math score was 274, eight points lower than 2019. As for reading, 8th graders showed an average score of 260, which was 3 points lower than 2019.

The achievement levels for the 2022 8th grade math scores are basic (262), proficient (299) and advanced (333).

As for Florida, the average score among sampled eighth graders was 271, down 8 points from 2019, which did not meet the level of proficiency.

Just 17 percent of 8th graders were proficient in math in Florida and 6 percent were considered advanced in the subject in 2022.

“Eighth grade is a pivotal moment in students’ mathematics education, as they develop key mathematics skills for further learning and potential careers in mathematics and science,” said Daniel J. McGrath, an education official with the National Center for Education Statistics, in a written statement. “If left unaddressed, this could alter the trajectories and life opportunities of a whole cohort of young people, potentially reducing their abilities to pursue rewarding and productive careers in mathematics, science, and technology.”

When it comes to reading, 70 percent of 8th graders tested were not proficient in reading, according to the 2022 results.

In 2019, the percent of students who were not considered proficient in reading was 66 percent.

The thresholds for 8th grade reading scores are: basic (243), proficient (281) and advanced (323). The average scale score for Florida in 2022 was 260, down from 263 in 2019.

Just 26 percent of Florida 8th graders were considered at least proficient in reading, and a mere 3 percent were considered advanced.

4th graders

A hefty handful of Florida fourth graders also struggled to reach proficiency in 2022 in reading. However, the average score – 225 – remained the same between 2019 and 2022, and Florida’s 225 is a higher score than the national average of 216.

Still, Florida’s fourth graders average score of 225 is not considered proficient.

For 4th grade, a score of at least 208 through 237 means the student has a basic reading achievement level. Students earning a score of 238 through 267 means the student is

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'proficient' at reading, and students who earn a score of 268 or higher mean they are "advanced."

For 4th grade math, the threshold for basic math skills was 214; proficient was 249, and advanced was 282.

The average scale score for Florida's 4th grade math students in 2022 was 241, down from 246 in 2019. However, that's higher than the national average of 235 among 4th graders nationally.

For 2022, about 33 percent of students were considered proficient in 4th grade mathematics and 8 percent were advanced.

The Monday press release from the Governor's office said that because the state performed higher than the national average in some areas that the results "demonstrate once again that keeping kids in school throughout 2020 and 2021 has put Florida students well ahead of their peers."

But Peggy Carr, commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, says it's not that clear.

"The declines, particularly in math, were comprehensive. Widespread. They were everywhere," Carr said in a virtual press conference Tuesday that went over the results of the 2022 NAEP scores.

"There's nothing in this data that allows us to draw a straight line from remote learning, in and of itself, to student performance. It's complicated," Carr said.

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Ms. OMAR. He was speaking to how wonderful Florida was doing in regard to education, and I just wanted this record to be entered into the record, just 17 percent of eighth graders were proficient in Math in Florida, and 6 percent were considered advanced in the subject in 2022.

I think it is really important for us to be able to share actual facts in Committees. When it came to Reading, 70 percent of eighth graders that were tested were not proficient in Reading according to these results.

Now, Governor Polis, from the free State of Colorado, I greet you as someone who represents the free State of Minnesota. I wanted to talk to you a little bit as both a parent, someone who sat on this Committee, and someone who now is a Governor. As a mom of four children who are in the fifth grade to juniors in high school and one sophomore in college, is there anything that is prohibiting parents from being involved in their children that you are aware of outside of time constraints that you and I might have?

Governor POLIS. I think that language can sometimes be a barrier and many of our school districts are taking great proactive approaches to—

Ms. OMAR. Do you know of any laws that say a parent cannot show up to PTA meetings—

Governor POLIS. No.

Ms. OMAR [continuing]. Or to school board meetings?

Governor POLIS. To the contrary, we are really focused on how we can get parents more involved.

Ms. OMAR. Yes. I participated in PTA meetings. I also was a guardian for two of my nieces. I went to almost all the school board hearings when my kids were younger before I got elected to Congress. I am sure you were involved or would love to be as involved. You probably would try to go on all the field trips, talk to all the teachers. My dad was actually notorious for showing up to my school, sitting in the back of the classrooms when I was in high school to the point that it drove me and my classmates insane.

I am not aware of, as you have just said, any decisions that are being made by lawmakers here in Congress, by local lawmakers that is saying we do not want parents' input. We do not want parents' involvement. We do not want parents' engagement in our schools. I just hope that we put this argument that is not based on the actual facts that are taking place in our communities to be put to rest.

I also wanted to congratulate you on some of the work that you are doing about addressing mental health issues in your State. Some of the ways in which you are using the bipartisan Safer Communities Act that we passed. Our State is also doing some incredible work in regard to higher education. I know that you talk about the importance of holding institutions accountable for deceitful practices. Your former colleague, Attorney General Pete Ellison, shut down a company that was fraudulently promising student loan forgiveness to Minnesotans, who often these types of practices target veterans. They target immigrants. They target the most vulnerable.

On the 4-years that I have sat on this Committee, we have done a lot of work on accountable for these types of practices and I am

proud of what we have been able to accomplish, and I am pleased to see that the Administration is working on gainful employment regulations. From your perspective, why is the Federal Government accountable important in higher education?

Governor POLIS. It is important, of course, from the Federal perspective and Congress's perspective because these are taxpayer dollars that you are custodians of. It is important from the customer's perspective, the individual who's benefiting, so that they have the knowledge and the data to back it up that the time and effort that they are putting in to better their lives will actually produce better earning outcomes and a better life for them and that they do not fall subject to a scam or somebody's attempt to take their money.

Ms. OMAR. Well, thank you. Again, I will say this is the Education Committee. We should be factual and talk about the truth. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Mr. DeSaulnier, you are recognized for 5 minutes and I am going to avoid responding to that right now?

Mr. DESAULNIER. To the 5-minutes? No, forget it. Well, thank you, Madame Chair. Thank you, Ranking Member. Thank you for this hearing. Thank you to the panelists and Governor, it is delightful to see you. You are triggering fond memories of a field trip that we took to the Bay area when you were on the Committee. I do not know if the Chair remembers our conversation when we were waiting for a ride on a street corner in San Francisco, but we'll leave that for another venue.

Governor Polis, I want to talk about just following up on the questions about outcomes as a former employer, some of the comments about making sure that we are getting people trained for the workforce and transparency in data collection. We have some support for the transparency, Higher Education Act, so that we make sure that the data is collected, and we have that to prove the outcomes. I wonder if you have any comments on that.

Governor POLIS. I think the next iteration and in generation and outcomes, of course, traditional measurements, job placement, loan repayment rates are very helpful and constructive. I think the next generation will be looking at return on investment in ROI and seeing how you can maximize the ROI from both time and dollars in terms of increased earning potential from the beneficiary.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Okay. I want to ask you some questions on a different subject matter that you have touched on specifically about ESSER funding and ARP, and the requirements to 5 percent and the 1 percent that we hold back. We know in states like California, where I am from, we did a lot of work. I led a bicameral and bipartisan taskforce on intersession and summer learning loss, and nutritional loss around the State. We have worked with, on a bipartisan level to make sure that we extended the school year in California, and other states have like Colorado, and we gave also provided more year-round afterschool programs.

It was a big issue for Governor Schwarzenegger and now in California, that we have free and reduced lunches with high nutritional standards, year-round, that the State pays for, largely. I wonder if you could talk about—we were prepared, in a way, not for the level of the pandemic, but we already knew about what we would lose when the kids were not in the classroom. There are other options

within the system that we are working on that increase performance, particularly for disadvantaged communities.

You have demonstrated leadership in your State on this issue. It does not have to be all about the COVID experience. We have learned lessons and the model has changed, so the social model, two income households, kids out of school with more time alone. Maybe you could address your experience in Colorado with positive outcomes.

Governor POLIS. First, it is very important to highlight that these types of innovations that California has undertaken, that Colorado has, and many states have would not have been possible without the American Rescue Act, without ESSER. That is what really empowered states to be able to say let us increase learning time, which is a very data-driven intervention. That is probably the single biggest utilization of funds, different ways of increasing learning time. It could be after school, summer programs, longer school year, these all take resources and take investment.

The revenue, of course, from our school districts was static to some even, of course, down during the midst of the pandemic. Really, these types of proven data-driven interventions that we know will improve student achievement would not have been possible without congressional action that we are very grateful there.

Now, that is the biggest bulk of it. On top of that, deployment of resources to address mental health challenges of students to make sure they are ready to learn. We talked about the nutritional element as well, housing security, a number of other social determinants of successful educational outcomes, but the single biggest is just the very traditional time on task, data driven, it works. Spending quality time learning Math, learning Reading helps the students get there.

Mr. DESAULNIER. I appreciate that. We were able to get a bill that I was the author of out of the House, Mental Health Matters Act. The Chairman and I have had discussions about this when she was the Ranking Member. I look forward to engaging my colleagues on the other side on what we do about developing a workforce around mental health, particularly, for young people. Yes, I just really appreciate the comments. Madame Chair, I always look forward to positive reinforcement for you, so I am going to yield back with 40 seconds left.

Chairwoman FOXX. Another gold star. Hurrah. I am going to recognize the Ranking Member of the Committee now for 5 minutes. Mr. Scott.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Madame Chair. Governor, it is good to see you back. I remember when you were a member of this Committee you had kind things to say about Early Childhood education. You mentioned that the childcare aspects of it would benefit the parents. Could you say a word about the long-term benefits to the student?

Governor POLIS. Yes. Several long-term longitudinal studies that have taken place over decades and saw the tremendous benefit of Early Childhood education often to the tune of 7 to \$12 for every dollar invested in quality Early Childhood education. Where do those benefits come from? Better high school graduation rates, lower youth adjudication rates, less interactions with law enforce-

ment, safer, higher earning potential, so a number of benefits have been shown from not just preschool and kindergarten, but quality birth to four as well to make sure that all kids have the advantage that some kids have of parents reading to them, of word spoken, of books discussed, and that is important to bring to more children to address this achievement gap before it occurs. It is harder to address in third grade and fifth grade than it is to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Mr. SCOTT. Along those lines, I remember one thing you said that you were on a study committee when you were in the State senate and concluded we are talking about high school achievement and the best way to improve high school achievement was to put all your money into Early Childhood education and wait 10 years.

Governor POLIS. You have an excellent memory, Mr. Ranking Member, so yes, the preface to the report. Of course, it is no excuse not to reform our high schools now and we want to improve them, but they will look much better and perform much better if every child gets a strong Early Childhood education.

Mr. SCOTT. Can you say a word about the importance of assessments and accountability in K through 12?

Governor POLIS. Yes, assessment and accountability are critical and that is one of the major deficiencies in some of these so-called choice models in states like Arizona where we will not even know, as a State, as country, what works, what leads to increased student achievement and what does not. It is important in Higher Ed. It is important in K-12.

If we are all about, and a number of members on both sides of the aisle have said, let us make sure kids learn Math, Reading, Writing. That is what we should focus on. We need to make sure we know whether they are achieving at grade level in those areas. Therefore, while no one enjoys assessment, it is really important to make sure that we are accountable for all students and that we can address persistent achievement gaps that occur along racial lines, along income lines, along geographic lines, and that we can have strategies to address those.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Mr. Sullivan, you mentioned the short-term PELL legislation that's pending now. You did not mention last year the House passed a short-term PELL bill that was a specific amendment to the Competes bill. The short-term PELL had overwhelming Democratic support. The Competes bill passed with overwhelming Democratic support, but it did not survive. You have heard from this side there is strong support.

You have also heard there are some problems with the for-profit and what we do not want to happen is we have short-term PELLs, and you set up some little storefront operations that deal out worthless credentials and take all the PELL money. My question is how would you differentiate the good programs from the bad programs?

Dr. SULLIVAN. Great question. Thank you for your leadership around Workforce PELL and with this group, this body in the past. I want to take a step back for 1 second and I would really like for you to think about, within the context of Workforce PELL we are opening up opportunities for people to be able to be educated in a

shorter period of time. I know I have said that a couple of times, but it is so very important.

Mr. SCOTT. We agree on that. Our community colleges programs, 6 to 16 weeks, tremendous programs. The question is if you open it up to everybody, you are going to be wasting a lot of money unless you have a screen that only appropriate vendors can get access to it and how do you separate the good from the bad?

Mr. SULLIVAN. It is a matter of employment. It is a matter of earnings. It is about job demand. It is about ensuring that people get value from the experience. I would urge that we continue down the path on the accountability front. This issue is too big for America's public institutions only to solve, with 60 million adults with a high school diploma or less.

Mr. SCOTT. We are trying to write legislation. Let me ask the other witnesses if they would have a quick statement about how we can legislate that would divide the good from the bad.

Mr. PULSIPHER. I would echo the fact that you should look at value and cost rather than modality or method or delivery mode. We certainly do not believe that online, for example, is a great delimiting factor of quality. The number of individuals today who actually utilize the online mode, especially with public and private nonprofit institutions, like WGU, it is ultimately about whether that program is delivered at a cost relative to the value of that program in the marketplace.

Mr. SCOTT. Can you legislate along those lines? We have got to write legislative language that separates the good from the bad, do you have examples of what we can use?

Mr. PULSIPHER. Yes, I certainly that you can utilize things, key results around how do students complete those programs, what is the attainment rate of jobs and opportunities of completeness of those programs and what was that value relative to the cost of actually completing the program. I think that increasing transparency and accountability at an institutional level is certainly possible.

Chairwoman FOXX. I think the Chairman's question is very important. I am going to let it go on, but do not take too long please.

Governor POLIS. I will be brief. I applaud WTU for the absence of Federal criteria, really thoughtfully coming up with their own criteria and that could help form part of a template for what the Federal Government looks at to maximize return on investment from investments that are made.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you. Madame Chair, I think you have heard from the answer that the for-profit/non-profit is not the split because there are some good for-profits and some bad non-profits. We have got to figure out how to make sure that the money is being spent well, and I think we are in agreement on that. It is an important possibility that we can get done.

Chairwoman FOXX. Yes, sir. That is why I wanted to let the questions go on.

Mr. SCOTT. I thought so.

Chairwoman FOXX. Mr. Courtney, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. Thank you to all the witnesses. I have been really kind of in and out here today and appreciate your patience and endurance here today.

One area where American education that I believe is not in crisis, in fact, it is highly valued is anything particularly in the moment we're in, in terms of our economy, is career and technical education funding. The omnibus that we just passed actually boosted the CTE account by \$100 million above last year. I come from a district, and the Governor remembers because we used to sit next to each other on this Committee a number of years ago, and my friend from Connecticut knows this. We have a shipyard that builds submarines, and the demand signal is off the chart in terms of the Columbia Class Program and the Virginia Class Program.

The good news is that it is gone from about 7,000 to about 13,000 workers. They have got to get up probably another 5,000. There are 1600 job openings, mostly in the metal trades, welding, electrician, sheet metal, you name it. The career and technical education programs that are there are completely packed with waiting lists. Secretary Cardona from Connecticut, who was a graduate from a tech school, came up and visited. Again, is a passionate believer that we have got to move this curriculum to comprehensive high school and that is actually what some of that new money that was in the Omnibus is going to be aimed at is in terms of trying to push that out.

There is a problem, and the President talked about this last night, which is, so if you have a master welder teaching kids how to just do almost intro welding, the good news is, is that when these kids graduate, even at high school age, they are probably starting at about \$50,000 a year, and in no time they are actually going to be making more money than the master welder who is teaching in the program there.

Trying to find a way to get the right skillset in the welding booths to teach what is a critical occupation right now for the country in terms of these programs is going to require having to come up with a way to pay for the quality that you need. I do not know if you are running into this, Governor Polis, in Colorado, but in the CTE area almost all of them are teaching skills that you could go out right now in this his economy and make far more than you could as a teacher.

Governor POLIS. Yes, I agree with the focus on increased resources and investment in career and technical. There are also opportunities, as you discussed, WIOA for allowable use of funds while students are still in school, as well as looking at additional partnership with the private sector like we have through Careerwise where students are able to replace for earn while you learn models while they are working. In effect, a kind of apprenticeship model that can complement the traditional career and technical education model.

Mr. COURTNEY. Again, Mr. Sullivan, I know this is in your space. I do not know if you had any comment, again, about trying to get the people in the classrooms.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Thank you for the question and thank you for the focus on CTE. In particular, I mentioned earlier one of the more difficult parts of creating the capacity is identifying that faculty member. One of the things that we have done is worked with our

industry partners. As someone begins to look at retirement, 6 months, 9 months prior to retirement from one of our business partners, being able to slide that individual over into the classroom and allowing them to teach and to be able to give back has been a really successful strategy for us. For that group they are not as concerned about the pay. They are concerned about giving back and so that has been a great strategy. What I know for certain is we do not have enough retirees to meet that capacity issue.

Mr. COURTNEY. I was just going to chime in with that point because they are tapping into that same pool and a lot of them are just super passionate about mentoring and really teaching people that manufacturing is not a dirty sort of dismal job. The fact of the matter is, is that is a really unreliable pool. I mean we have to figure out a way, again, to get the people who have the talent. I mean welding an admiral who was down there once described a nuclear welder is about as skilled as a brain surgeon. I mean there is no margin for error when you are building a vessel that does not support human life.

Again, I think it is just something we need to think about in terms of this question about 11 million job openings in the economy, highly concentrated in manufacturing, and how do we get people connected with the right teachers to make sure they can help the country and succeed for themselves. I yield back.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Courtney. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I have got three questions to ask, so I will ask you all to keep that in mind.

Mr. Pulsipher, you brought out from both sides of the aisle the interest in ROI. It is clear that there is bipartisan support for that. Could you briefly describe how this metric could be applied in the broader, post-secondary context, risk sharing, performance bonuses offer, in demand, high quality credentials, just a few more points on what you brought up before.

Governor POLIS. The ones you touched upon, risk sharing is an excellent example—oh, sorry, Mr. Pulsipher.

Mr. PULSIPHER. Thank you, Chairwoman. I do think the more we can bring a spotlight to value the better. That is for sure. I would share with you some of the things that we have held ourselves accountable to. To increase value, you have to increase completion rates, so you have to look how well are students, who are beginning the program, completing the program. You then have to look at whether or not having completed that program, are they actually obtaining employment in the field of study, and are they achieving the economic return on that, and what does that look like for the students through that program.

Third, you absolutely have to be able to look at the cost of completing that program. There is no doubt that in many programs today that the wage for—you know completeness of that program has not increased at the same rate the cost to achieve it has.

I certainly believe that we can increase reporting and accountability at institution level for such metrics. We certainly can also involve the creditors in looking at institutions to present their plans to improve those outcomes. When we do so, we can give that information to students so they are making better choices about their future.

Chairwoman FOXX. Thank you. I appreciate that. Mrs. Gentles, I want to go back to Mr. Bowman asking you a question about balanced literacy and phonic-based reading instruction. There was a followup with Ms. Houchin. Mr. Bowman did not give you a chance to respond, but I know from my reading there is significant research showing what does and does not work when teaching kids to read. Could you respond to Mr. Bowman's argument that balanced literacy is an effective approach to reading instruction?

Mrs. GENTLES. Right, well, reading influences every aspect of life and we know that students are learning to read up until third grade and then from there they are reading to learn. Unfortunately, for too long there has been this balanced literacy approach that has taught children to read the wrong way and the queuing that we were briefly discussing is an important component of that, which essentially tells children to memorize some words, guess based on pictures and clues and context and then skip words that they are not familiar with. This guessing learning of reading is a huge reason that we have such abysmal literacy rates and fortunately, there is an effort to address this.

What we heard as well today, is that children with dyslexia and other learning disability are the ones who are extremely harmed by this. Children with disabilities suffered in the COVID closures and they have suffered through these awful literacy programs that have been debunked and their needs to be prioritized going forward.

Chairwoman FOXX. I am very pleased that we have Ms. Houchin on the Committee because I know she is going to bring some great wisdom to this issue, along with some others.

Mr. Sullivan, I would like for you to—I have lost my questions. Goodness, gracious here. You have recommended addressing the problem of people not using WIOA, companies not using WIOA, you addressed the problem. You recommended improving coordination with the Higher Ed Act. Could you talk a little bit more about that and how we could have better coordination between the two systems and that would lead to more workers gaining in-demand skills.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Thank you for the question. Let me begin by just pointing out that we have two primary funds in this Nation that fund talent, the PELL grant and WIOA. I have a question for you. Why would we keep them separate? We are trying to accomplish one workforce in this Nation and yet we are using funds from two different instruments that have lots of different prescriptive rules around them that make it exceptionally difficult to accomplish the goal that we have set out. At a minimum, a level of coordination that focuses the United States dollar on solving the issue at hand.

Chairwoman FOXX. I am going to take a little point of personal privilege here to say I think everybody who is going into any kind of education program is looking to come out with a career. I have been preaching for a long time that whether you bet a baccalaureate degree, whether you get a diploma, whether you get a certificate, you are in career education and I dislike very much separating one kind of education from another kind of education.

I have talked about that a lot because, again, I was getting an English degree. I wanted a job. If you are going into learning to weld, you want a job. I think it is really terrible that we are sepa-

rating people that way and so I really appreciate you bringing that up and giving me the opportunity to respond to that. I do think it is something we have to really focus on, and I think talking more about short-term PELL and how we can help people gain skills that will lead them to a career, whether it involves a baccalaureate degree or Master's degree, or Doctorate, or whatever that is, but we desperately want people to get skills to be able to improve their lives in the long term.

I want to thank all of you for being here today. I think we have had an excellent hearing. Governor Polis, I appreciate you very, very much for coming back. You and I always—I have always felt you had great common sense and you proved it again today and I appreciate it. I am very pleased that we have had this as our first hearing, and we have a lot of work to do for the American people. Thank you all for coming and sharing your wisdom with us and I thank everybody in the audience. The meeting is adjourned.

**STATEMENT OF
DR. MERODIE HANCOCK
PRESIDENT, THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY
FOR THE WRITTEN RECORD
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE**

February 16, 2023

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, my name is Merodie Hancock, and I am president of Thomas Edison State University in New Jersey. In 1972, the state of New Jersey created Thomas Edison State University to break the mold of traditional higher education. Our vision is straightforward: Building careers. Advancing professions. Empowering lives. We meet working adults where they are in life and take them to the next level: whether starting a degree, completing a first degree, adding a graduate degree, or completing a professional certificate. We continue to create innovative pathways to education and deliver on the promise to make education accessible to nontraditional learners. We see our role as an engine to help the innovation economy by uplifting adults toward career advancement.

Today the University offers associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs as well as undergraduate and graduate certificates in more than 100 areas of study and is a nationally recognized pillar of higher education innovation with a proven track record in offering Credit for Prior Learning (CPL). CPL allows individual learners to demonstrate prior college-level learning that has occurred outside of traditional educational settings. It encompasses many credit-earning opportunities providing a highly efficient and economical approach for learners to progress toward a degree. More than half of TESU students receive credit for some form of prior learning.

In the last five years, Thomas Edison State University has awarded more than 1 million credits, equivalent to \$544 million in tuition, for college-level learning outside the classroom. Under the auspice of credit for prior learning or CPL, TESU offers several pathways for students to earn credit. The most recognized credit evaluation occurs through the American Council on Education. TESU is one of the largest recipients of ACE credit in the United States, receiving, on average, more than 150,000 credits of ACE-evaluated military credit and 34,000 credits from ACE non-military learning experiences per year. Beyond ACE, there are external (DSST[®], CLEP[®], etc.) and internal (TECEP[®]) exams and TESU's individualized learning portfolios to evaluate nontraditional student learning. These are smaller, but important parts of our learning evaluation ecosystem.

In addition, Thomas Edison State University conducts our own review of noncollegiate, apprenticeship, and workplace training opportunities to determine college credit equivalency. We call this method Professional Learning Review or PLR. Students who leverage PLR credits receive, on average, 38 credits per student, valued at more than half of an associate degree. We awarded 66,000 credits of college-level learning to students for PLR in 2021 alone — a collective saving to students of more than \$25 million in tuition dollars.

At the macro level, the cost savings resulting from the University's CPL efforts for the accumulated 275,000 credits awarded in FY2021 totaled more than \$90 million, an unheralded investment accelerating workforce development. Further, the burden on students, federal aid, state aid, and military funding is significantly eased because enrolling students are not charged to access these credit awards.

The commitment to assessing student learning outside the traditional classroom is complex and time-consuming and demands tremendous quality control measures. Thomas Edison State University is a national leader with a strong proven track record of assessing learning in this way for undergraduate and graduate-level programs.

We are working on launching an innovative Center in New Jersey structured to address the critical need for skilled workers across industries and support the degree attainment goals of working students. The proposed Center for Career Relevant Education and Talent Evaluation (CreateNJ) will empower the individual, capturing their career-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities stemming from their formal higher education, technical training, workplace training, and apprenticeship training into one comprehensive and transportable document that grows with their accomplishments. This will validate their time and talents and allow them to represent themselves more accurately within the workforce and to academic institutions. Documenting this training and identifying the next steps will allow workers to see and reach their full potential academically and professionally, making attainable what may otherwise have seemed out of reach. In capturing this information, Thomas Edison State University intends to translate these achievements into a language readily identifiable and understood by industry, thereby building a more robust and informed pipeline for employers. By linking skills and knowledge to the workforce and professional opportunities, employers can view current or future employees based on skills and credential attainment.

CreateNJ and the New Jersey Workforce Transcript will place us at the forefront of validated skills-based learning and solidify us as leaders in lifelong talent development. The New Jersey Workforce transcript will translate these reviews, including industry-recognized credentials, certificates, and licensures, into demonstrated knowledge and skills. Once translated into academic equivalencies and comparable industry skills, this knowledge will be mapped to create pathways to degree attainment. The talent and competency mapping will result from the collaboration between external partners and the utilization of CreateNJ and TESU resources.

A Lumina Foundation survey suggests that credit for prior learning "boosts completion rates for adult students and has the potential to close unfair, persistent equity gaps in degree and credential attainment." These completion rates particularly affect underserved populations who use CPL, showing a 14 percent increase in completion rates of Black adult students, 24 percent for Hispanic adult students, and 25 percent for community college students.^[1]

TESU's model of recognizing college-level learning wherever and however it occurs is ingrained in the University's mission and permeates our service to students.

^[1] Sedlak, W. (2021, January 26). Prior learning assessment: Give higher-ed credit where credit is due. Lumina Foundation.

It is critical that we develop a mechanism to communicate and legitimize the diverse skills and knowledge acquired by the learner in a way that aligns with employer needs, that these skills are reflected in clear credentials, and, where appropriate, that they lead to validated academic achievement and degree attainment.

As we look forward to the next 50 years, I hope you will call on me as a resource on higher education issues, including non-traditional student needs and workforce development issues.

Thank you.



Representative Virginia Foxx
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Bobby Scott
2328 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA), we thank Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott and the U.S. House Committee on Education & the Workforce for holding the congressional hearing on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 to discuss the state of our nation's education system, and offer this letter for the record.

National PTA represents millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders across all 50 states, Washington D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and DoDEA schools in Europe. For over 125 years, our association has been a powerful voice for all children, a reputable resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for improving our nation's education system. As the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, National PTA has a rich history of making every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Parent & Family Engagement

We were appreciative that during the hearing on February 8, Chairwoman Foxx, Representative Bonamici, and other Committee Members acknowledged the importance of parent and family engagement in their children's education. Decades of research shows that family engagement matters for student success—students whose families are engaged are more likely to attend school, avoid discipline problems, achieve at higher levels and graduate. Family engagement also helps schools—research suggests it is equally as important as school leadership and a rigorous curriculum in predicting school improvement.

We know that parents and families play an important role in education by acting as key partners in their children's educational success and providing important perspectives on decisions impacting their children and schools. However, far too often when policy is considered and legislation is crafted, family engagement is not directly called out as a critical strategy in achieving desired student outcomes. In 2015, the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed and signed into law, making critical



improvements to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, enabling greater transparency for parents in K-12 education and encouraging schools to invest in family engagement. While the law made critical improvements, many school districts still struggle to meaningfully connect with families in their community.

Federal lawmakers should support schools in their efforts to meaningfully share power with parents and caregivers, welcome and communicate effectively with all families, and collaborate with families and the community to support student success. Members of the 118th Congress can strengthen family-school partnerships and invest in meaningful family engagement by passing legislation that:

- Provides funding to incentivize and support family engagement initiatives in schools and communities across the country, including increasing funding for the federal Statewide Family Engagement Centers program;
- Increases awareness of effective family engagement strategies, including expanding research, technical assistance, and training for school personnel on transformative family engagement strategies; and
- Encourages greater transparency with families about decisions impacting their children. This includes proactive, timely and two-way communication in an understandable and accessible format and in a language families can understand.

While we appreciate legislation that seeks to foster greater transparency for families around issues like school curriculum and reading materials, our association believes that any legislation that receives consideration by Congress must not disproportionately impact or exclude certain students, especially LGBTQ+ students and other historically targeted or marginalized groups. Our association has passed several positions related to this concern, including positions on [inclusive curricula in K-12 education](#), [libraries and educational material](#), [institutional racism](#), and [LGBTQ+ students](#). We would welcome the opportunity to share more details about these positions, including the invaluable feedback we received on these issues from parents and caregivers across the country.

National PTA stands ready to assist Congress in these efforts to meaningfully engage families and more effectively uplift the family voice in education. For over 20 years, our [National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#) have been setting the bar for how schools and parent organizations can most effectively work together to support student success. The Standards are based on the latest research and best practices on effective family engagement and provide guideposts that have been used by PTAs, schools, districts, state education agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education. As



the nation's oldest and largest child advocacy association, National PTA has a rich history of, and expertise in, strengthening family-school partnerships and investing in meaningful family engagement. We have new research and insight into parent priorities and concerns right now and are always happy to support legislative efforts in this area to the best of our ability, providing helpful feedback, engaging key constituencies, and sharing their on-the-ground experiences with your offices.

Family engagement has historically been a strong bipartisan issue. For example, leaders of recent congressional Dear Colleague letters supporting robust funding for the federal [Statewide Family Engagement Centers program](#) include Representative DeSaulnier (D-CA), Representative Thompson (R-PA), Senator Coons (D-DE), Senator Reed (D-RI), and Senator Tillis (R-NC). We look forward to working with Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to increase funding for this critical program and build meaningful partnerships between our nation's schools, teachers, and families.

School Choice & Private Vouchers

It is during this challenging time that the federal government should focus on providing more resources to our public schools, which serve the vast majority of our nation's students, particularly students from under-resourced communities and students of color, rather than siphoning limited resources to private schools.

We know that private school choice systems have had detrimental effects on our public school systems. Moreover, many voucher programs have proven ineffective in improving students' academic achievement, lack accountability, deprive students of the rights and protections they would receive in public schools, and fail in providing adequate services for students most in need, including students with disabilities, low-income students, and students who are English learners.

It would be a devastating mistake for our nation's education system for Congress to divert public money into any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system, including the District of Columbia private school voucher program. This includes tax credits and deductions for elementary and secondary school tuition and other education-related expenses for public and nonpublic school students. Instead, Congress must not abandon public education and should focus on the improvement of public education for all children. Public dollars *must* remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students and for the future of our nation.

At the same time, we know that no one educational program is best for all children. Our association works every day with public school personnel and parents to address the



different ways that children learn and how public school systems can provide the best education for all children. We also acknowledge public charter schools as one of many avenues to improving student achievement and support public charter schools, provided the authorizing bodies and schools reflect the positions and principles of National PTA in charters granted and implemented.

For more policy recommendations in the area of school choice, please see our association's [Position Statement Opposing Vouchers, Tuition Tax Credits and Deductions as Systems of Education Aids](#), [Position Statement on Public School Choice](#), and [Position Statement on Public Charter Schools](#).

Postsecondary, Career, & Technical Education

Every student should be afforded every opportunity to graduate from high school while being adequately prepared for and encouraged to pursue postsecondary education, which includes vocational education. We know that postsecondary education substantially increases one's long-term earnings potential, lowers incarceration rates, and benefits society as a whole through lessening the burden on social safety net programs. However, the cost of a postsecondary education is often prohibitive for many, and the availability of non-loan student aid has not kept pace with the need in the face of increased enrollment and tuition, fees, and expenses.

National PTA supports legislation and programs intended to increase postsecondary participation through assisting students' secondary school completion and postsecondary enrollment by providing academic (which includes fine arts) services, parent and student counseling services, and college preparatory services, particularly those programs that will assist students with different learning styles, low-income students, and disadvantaged youth. Our association also supports legislation and programs that foster an economically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student population by increasing federal grants to students and other forms of financial aid, simplifying the application process for applying for all forms of aid, improving and increasing access to information on financial assistance for postsecondary education, and expanding access to in-state tuition levels. Because every student that has graduated from a U.S. high school should have the right, regardless of their learning styles or financial means, to attend a postsecondary institution, providing an economically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student population and a richer education experience for all students.

Our association also understands that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide a career pathway through education for students at all levels of academic



achievement who wish to gain hands-on experience in an ever-widening array of occupations, many in emerging industries that will dominate the job market in the years to come. We know that evidence indicates significant return on investment and economic benefits for state economies and federal funding can cover most, if not all, student expenses related to CTE. Our association supports increased funding for CTE programs, including registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, as well as providing appropriate market-driven compensation for CTE instructors and promoting flexibility in the expansion of career education pathways. We also recommend an investment in educating the public regarding recent changes in the scope and nature of CTE programs and strongly advocate for the recruitment of a diverse population of CTE program enrollees so that all individuals have the opportunity to access, fully participate in and contribute to the national and state economic prosperity.

For more policy recommendations in the area of postsecondary education and career readiness, please see our association's [Position Statement on Career and Technical Education](#) and [Resolution on High School Graduation, College Preparation, and Access](#).

Conclusion

There is much work to be done at the local, state, and federal level to improve our nation's education system. But no single solution will suffice.

Congress must strengthen family-school partnerships and invest in meaningful family engagement, including encouraging greater transparency and communication with families and providing funding to incentivize and support family engagement initiatives in schools and communities across the country.

Congress must enhance school and community safety and prioritize the protection of children and youth, including addressing the ongoing gun violence epidemic and youth access to deadly firearms.

Congress must help schools create welcoming, supportive, and inclusive learning environments for all students, including encouraging the development of inclusive, historically accurate, age and developmentally appropriate materials and supporting every student's mental health.

Congress must promote a safe and positive online experience for children and youth and expand access to technology that fosters learning and well-being.



Congress must support successful strategies for academic recovery, including new and innovative approaches such as summer learning and after-school enrichment programs.

And finally, Congress must increase federal investment in public education to ensure all children have access to adequately funded public schools that improve their overall well-being and allow students to reach their full potential.

For a deeper discussion of these recommendations, please see [National PTA's 2023-2025 Public Policy Priorities](#).

Again, we would like to thank Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and the House Committee on Education & the Workforce for holding the congressional hearing on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 to discuss the state of our nation's education system, and are grateful for the opportunity to offer this letter for the record. Please feel free to contact our Director of Government Affairs, Kate Clabaugh, at kclabaugh@pta.org if you have any questions or would like to discuss any of these recommendations further. We look forward to working with Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and other Members of this Committee to make every child's potential a reality through meaningful federal policy change during the 118th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna King".

Anna King
President
National PTA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan R. Monell".

Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA



Original Investigation | Pediatrics

Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care

Diana M. Tordoff, MPH; Jonathon W. Wanta, MD; Arin Collin, BA; Cesalie Stepney, PhD; David J. Inwards-Breland, MD, MPH; Kym Ahrens, MD, MPH

Abstract

IMPORTANCE Transgender and nonbinary (TNB) youths are disproportionately burdened by poor mental health outcomes owing to decreased social support and increased stigma and discrimination. Although gender-affirming care is associated with decreased long-term adverse mental health outcomes among these youths, less is known about its association with mental health immediately after initiation of care.

OBJECTIVE To investigate changes in mental health over the first year of receiving gender-affirming care and whether initiation of puberty blockers (PBs) and gender-affirming hormones (GAHs) was associated with changes in depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

DESIGN, SETTING, AND PARTICIPANTS This prospective observational cohort study was conducted at an urban multidisciplinary gender clinic among TNB adolescents and young adults seeking gender-affirming care from August 2017 to June 2018. Data were analyzed from August 2020 through November 2021.

EXPOSURES Time since enrollment and receipt of PBs or GAHs.

MAIN OUTCOMES AND MEASURES Mental health outcomes of interest were assessed via the Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item (PHQ-9) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) scales, which were dichotomized into measures of moderate or severe depression and anxiety (ie, scores ≥ 10), respectively. Any self-report of self-harm or suicidal thoughts over the previous 2 weeks was assessed using PHQ-9 question 9. Generalized estimating equations were used to assess change from baseline in each outcome at 3, 6, and 12 months of follow-up. Bivariate and multivariable logistic models were estimated to examine temporal trends and investigate associations between receipt of PBs or GAHs and each outcome.

RESULTS Among 104 youths aged 13 to 20 years (mean [SD] age, 15.8 [1.6] years) who participated in the study, there were 63 transmasculine individuals (60.6%), 27 transfeminine individuals (26.0%), 10 nonbinary or gender fluid individuals (9.6%), and 4 youths who responded "I don't know" or did not respond to the gender identity question (3.8%). At baseline, 59 individuals (56.7%) had moderate to severe depression, 52 individuals (50.0%) had moderate to severe anxiety, and 45 individuals (43.3%) reported self-harm or suicidal thoughts. By the end of the study, 69 youths (66.3%) had received PBs, GAHs, or both interventions, while 35 youths had not received either intervention (33.7%). After adjustment for temporal trends and potential confounders, we observed 60% lower odds of depression (adjusted odds ratio [aOR], 0.40; 95% CI, 0.17-0.95) and 73% lower odds of suicidality (aOR, 0.27; 95% CI, 0.11-0.65) among youths who had initiated PBs or GAHs compared with youths who had not. There was no association between PBs or GAHs and anxiety (aOR, 1.01; 95% CI, 0.41, 2.51).

(continued)

Key Points

Question Is gender-affirming care for transgender and nonbinary (TNB) youths associated with changes in depression, anxiety, and suicidality?

Findings In this prospective cohort of 104 TNB youths aged 13 to 20 years, receipt of gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers and gender-affirming hormones, was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up.

Meaning This study found that access to gender-affirming care was associated with mitigation of mental health disparities among TNB youths over 1 year; given this population's high rates of adverse mental health outcomes, these data suggest that access to pharmacological interventions may be associated with improved mental health among TNB youths over a short period.

[+ Invited Commentary](#)[+ Supplemental content](#)

Author affiliations and article information are listed at the end of this article.

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February 25, 2022 1/13

Abstract (continued)

CONCLUSIONS AND RELEVANCE This study found that gender-affirming medical interventions were associated with lower odds of depression and suicidality over 12 months. These data add to existing evidence suggesting that gender-affirming care may be associated with improved well-being among TNB youths over a short period, which is important given mental health disparities experienced by this population, particularly the high levels of self-harm and suicide.

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Introduction

Transgender and nonbinary (TNB) youths are disproportionately burdened by poor mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation and attempts.¹⁻⁵ These disparities are likely owing to high levels of social rejection, such as a lack of support from parents^{6,7} and bullying,^{6,8,9} and increased stigma and discrimination experienced by TNB youths. Multidisciplinary care centers have emerged across the country to address the health care needs of TNB youths, which include access to medical gender-affirming interventions, such as puberty blockers (PBs) and gender-affirming hormones (GAHs).¹⁰ These centers coordinate care and help youths and their families address barriers to care, such as lack of insurance coverage¹¹ and travel times.¹² Gender-affirming care is associated with decreased rates of long-term adverse outcomes among TNB youths. Specifically, PBs, GAHs, and gender-affirming surgeries have all been found to be independently associated with decreased rates of depression, anxiety, and other adverse mental health outcomes.¹³⁻¹⁶ Access to these interventions is also associated with a decreased lifetime incidence of suicidal ideation among adults who had access to PBs during adolescence.¹⁷ Conversely, TNB youths who present to care later in adolescence or young adulthood experience more adverse mental health outcomes.¹⁸ Despite this robust evidence base, legislation criminalizing and thus limiting access to gender-affirming medical care for minors is increasing.^{19,20}

Less is known about the association of gender-affirming care with mental health outcomes immediately after initiation of care. Several studies published from 2015 to 2020 found that receipt of PBs or GAHs was associated with improved psychological functioning²¹ and body satisfaction,²² as well as decreased depression²³ and suicidality²⁴ within a 1-year period. Initiation of gender-affirming care may be associated with improved short-term mental health owing to validation of gender identity and clinical staff support. Conversely, prerequisite mental health evaluations, often perceived as pathologizing by TNB youths, and initiation of GAHs may present new stressors that may be associated with exacerbation of mental health symptoms early in care, such as experiences of discrimination associated with more frequent points of engagement in a largely cisnormative health care system (eg, interactions with nonaffirming pharmacists to obtain laboratory tests, syringes, and medications).²⁵ Given the high risk of suicidality among TNB adolescents, there is a pressing need to better characterize mental health trends for TNB youths early in gender-affirming care. This study aimed to investigate changes in mental health among TNB youths enrolled in an urban multidisciplinary gender clinic over the first 12 months of receiving care. We also sought to investigate whether initiation of PBs or GAHs was associated with depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

Methods

This cohort study received approval from the Seattle Children's Hospital Institutional Review Board. For youths younger than age 18 years, caregiver consent and youth assent was obtained. For youths ages 18 years and older, youth consent alone was obtained. The 12-month assessment was funded via a different mechanism than other survey time points; thus, participants were reconsented for the

12-month survey. The study follows the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) reporting guideline.

Study Procedures

We conducted a prospective observational cohort study of TNB youths seeking care at Seattle Children's Gender Clinic, an urban multidisciplinary gender clinic. After a referral is placed or a patient self-refers, new patients, their caregivers, or patients with their caregivers are scheduled for a 1-hour phone intake with a care navigator who is a licensed clinical social worker. Patients are then scheduled for an appointment at the clinic with a medical provider.

All patients who completed the phone intake and in-person appointment between August 2017 and June 2018 were recruited for this study. Participants completed baseline surveys within 24 hours of their first appointment and were invited to complete follow-up surveys at 3, 6, and 12 months. Youth surveys were used to assess most variables in this study; caregiver surveys were used to assess caregiver income. Participation and completion of study surveys had no bearing on prescribing of PBs or GAHs.

Measures

Mental Health Variables

We assessed 3 internalizing mental health outcomes: depression, generalized anxiety, and suicidality. Depression was assessed using the Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale (PHQ-9), and anxiety was assessed using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7). We dichotomized PHQ-9 and GAD-7 scores into measures of moderate or severe depression and anxiety (ie, scores ≥ 10).^{26,27} Self-harm and suicidal thoughts were assessed using PHQ-9 question 9 (eTable 1 in the Supplement).

Pharmacological Interventions

Participants self-reported if they had ever received GAHs, including estrogen or testosterone, or PBs (eg, gonadotropin-releasing hormone analogues) on each survey. We conducted a medical record review to capture prescription of androgen blockers (eg, spironolactone) and medications for menstrual suppression or contraception (ie, medroxyprogesterone acetate or levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine device) during the study period.

Covariates

We a priori considered potential confounders hypothesized to be associated with our exposures and outcomes of interest based on theory and prior research. Self-reported gender was ascertained on each survey using a 2-step question that asked participants about their current gender and their sex assigned at birth. If a participant's self-reported gender changed across surveys, we used the gender reported most frequently by a participant (3 individuals identified as transmasculine at baseline and as nonbinary on all follow-up surveys). We collected data on self-reported race and ethnicity (available response options were Arab or Middle Eastern; Asian; Black or African American; Latinx; Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian; Pacific Islander; and White), age, caregiver income, and insurance type. Race and ethnicity were assessed as potential covariates owing to known barriers to accessing gender-affirming care among transgender youth who are members of minority racial and ethnic groups. For descriptive statistics, Asian and Pacific Islander groups were combined owing to small population numbers. We included a baseline variable reflecting receipt of ongoing mental health therapy other than for the purpose of a mental health assessment to receive a gender dysphoria diagnosis. We included a self-report variable reflecting whether youths felt their gender identity or expression was a source of tension with their parents or guardians. Substance use included any alcohol, marijuana, or other drug use in the past year. Resilience was measured by the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) 10-item score developed to measure change in an individual's state resilience over time.²⁸ Resilience scores were

dichotomized into high (ie, \geq median) and low (ie, $<$ median). Prior studies of young adults in the US reported mean CD-RISC scores ranging from 27.2 to 30.1.^{29,30}

Statistical Analysis

We used generalized estimating equations to assess change in outcomes from baseline at each follow-up point (eFigure 1 in the Supplement). We used a logit link function to estimate adjusted odds ratio (aOR) for the association between variables and each mental health outcome. We initially estimated bivariate associations between potential confounders and mental health outcomes. Multivariable models included variables that were statistically significant in bivariate models. For all outcomes and models, statistical significance was defined as 95% CIs that did not contain 1.00. Reported *P* values are based on 2-sided Wald test statistics.

Model 1 examined temporal trends in mental health outcomes, with time (ie, baseline, 3, 6, and 12 months) modeled as a categorical variable. Model 2 estimated the association between receipt of PBs or GAHs and mental health outcomes adjusted for temporal trends and potential confounders. Receipt of PBs or GAHs was modeled as a composite binary time-varying exposure that compared mean outcomes between participants who had initiated PBs or GAHs and those who had not across all time points (eTable 2 in the Supplement). All models used an independent working correlation structure and robust standard errors to account for the time-varying exposure variable.

We performed several sensitivity analyses. Because our data were from an observational cohort, we first considered the degree to which they were sensitive to unmeasured confounding. To do this, we calculated the *E*-value for the association between PBs or GAHs and mental health outcomes in model 2. The *E*-value is defined as the minimum strength of association that a confounder would need to have with both exposure and outcome to completely explain away their association (eTable 4 in the Supplement).³¹ Second, we performed sensitivity analyses on several subsets of youths. We separately examined the association of PBs and GAHs with outcomes of interest, although we a priori did not anticipate being powered to detect statistically significant outcomes owing to our small sample size and the relatively low proportion of youths who accessed PBs. We also conducted sensitivity analyses using the Patient Health Questionnaire 8-item scale (PHQ-8), in which the PHQ-9 question 9 regarding self-harm or suicidal thoughts was removed, given that we analyzed this item as a separate outcome. Lastly, we restricted our analysis to minor youths ages 13 to 17 years because they were subject to different laws and policies related to consent and prerequisite mental health assessments. We used R statistical software version 3.6.2 (R Project for Statistical Computing) to conduct all analyses. Data were analyzed from August 2020 through November 2021.

Results

A total of 169 youths were screened for eligibility during the study period, among whom 161 eligible youths were approached. Nine youths or caregivers declined participation, and 39 youths did not complete consent or assent or did not complete the baseline survey, leaving a sample of 113 youths (70.2% of approached youths). We excluded 9 youths aged younger than 13 years from the analysis because they received different depression and anxiety screeners. Our final sample included 104 youths ages 13 to 20 years (mean [SD] age, 15.8 [1.6] years). Of these individuals, 84 youths (80.8%), 84 youths, and 65 youths (62.5%) completed surveys at 3, 6, and 12 months, respectively.

Our cohort included 63 transmasculine youths (60.6%), 27 transfeminine youths (26.0%), 10 nonbinary or gender fluid youths (9.6%), and 4 youths who responded "I don't know" or did not respond to the gender identity question on all completed questionnaires (3.8%) (Table 1). There were 4 Asian or Pacific Islander youths (3.8%), 3 Black or African American youths (2.9%); 9 Latinx youths (8.7%); 6 Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian youths (5.8%); 67 White youths (64.4%); and 9 youths who reported more than 1 race or ethnicity (8.7%). Race and ethnicity data were missing for 6 youth (5.8%).

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Participants, No. (%) (N = 104)
Gender	
Male or transgender male	63 (60.6)
Female or transgender female	27 (26.0)
Nonbinary or gender fluid	10 (9.6)
Don't know or missing	4 (3.8)
Race and ethnicity^a	
Asian or Pacific Islander	4 (3.8)
Black or African American	3 (2.9)
Latinx	9 (8.7)
Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian	6 (5.8)
White	67 (64.4)
More than 1 race or ethnicity chosen	9 (8.7)
Missing	6 (5.8)
Age at baseline, y	
13	8 (7.7)
14	20 (19.2)
15	18 (17.3)
16	22 (21.2)
17	22 (21.2)
18	8 (7.7)
19	5 (4.8)
20	1 (1.0)
Pharmacological intervention	
PBs ^b	19 (18.2)
GAHs ^b	64 (61.5)
Androgen blockers ^c	17 (51.5)
Menstrual suppression or contraception ^d	25 (35.2)
Depression at baseline (using PHQ-9)	
0-4 (minimal)	14 (13.5)
5-9 (mild)	27 (26.0)
10-14 (moderate)	22 (21.2)
15-19 (moderately severe)	11 (10.6)
≥20 (severe)	26 (25.0)
Missing	4 (3.8)
Anxiety at baseline (using GAD-7)	
0-4 (minimal)	20 (19.2)
5-9 (mild)	28 (26.9)
10-14 (moderate)	20 (19.2)
≥15 (severe)	32 (30.8)
Missing	4 (3.8)
Self-harm or suicidal thoughts at baseline	45 (43.2)
Receiving mental health therapy	65 (62.5)
Tension with caregiver about gender identity or expression	36 (34.6)
Any substance use	34 (32.7)
Resilience at baseline (using CD-RISC 10)	
0-10	8 (7.7)
10-20	35 (33.7)
21-30	15 (14.4)
30-40	34 (32.7)
Missing	12 (11.5)

Abbreviations: CD-RISC 10, Connor-Davidson 10-item Resilience Scale; GAD-7, Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale; GAH, gender-affirming hormone; PB, puberty blocker; PHQ-9 Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale.

^a Available response options for race and ethnicity were Arab or Middle Eastern; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black or African American; Latinx; Native American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian; Pacific Islander; and White. Asian and Pacific Islander groups were combined owing to small population sizes.

^b Self-reported receipt ever of PBs or GAHs at baseline or through the end of the study period.

^c Includes androgen blockers received during the study period; percentage is among 33 youths assigned male sex at birth.

^d Includes pharmacological interventions for menstrual suppression or contraception received during the study period; percentage is among 71 youths assigned female sex at birth.

At baseline, 7 youths had ever received PBs or GAHs (including 1 youth who received PBs, 4 youths who received GAHs, and 2 youths who received both PBs and GAHs). By the end of the study, 69 youths (66.3%) had received PBs or GAHs (including 50 youths who received GAHs only [48.1%], 5 youths who received PBs only [4.8%], and 14 youths who received PBs and GAHs [13.5%]), while 35 youths had not received either PBs or GAHs (33.7%) (eTable 3 in the Supplement). Among 33 participants assigned male sex at birth, 17 individuals (51.5%) had received androgen blockers, and among 71 participants assigned female sex at birth, 25 individuals (35.2%) had received menstrual suppression or contraceptives by the end of the study.

A large proportion of youths reported depressive and anxious symptoms at baseline. Specifically, 59 individuals (56.7%) had baseline PHQ-9 scores of 10 or more, suggesting moderate to severe depression; there were 22 participants (21.2%) scoring in the moderate range, 11 participants (10.6%) in the moderately severe range, and 26 participants (25.0%) in the severe range. Similarly, half of participants had a GAD-7 score suggestive of moderate to severe anxiety at baseline (52 individuals [50.0%]), including 20 participants (19.2%) scored in the moderate range, and 32 participants (30.8%) scored in the severe range. There were 45 youths (43.3%) who reported self-harm or suicidal thoughts in the prior 2 weeks. At baseline, 65 youths (62.5%) were receiving ongoing mental health therapy, 36 youths (34.6%) reported tension with their caregivers about their gender identity or expression, and 34 youths (32.7%) reported any substance use in the prior year. Lastly, we observed a wide range of resilience scores (median [range], 22.5 [1-38], with higher scores equating more resiliency). There were no statistically significant differences in baseline characteristics by gender.

In bivariate models, substance use was associated with all mental health outcomes (Table 2). Youths who reported any substance use were 4-fold as likely to have PHQ-9 scores of moderate to severe depression (aOR, 4.38; 95% CI, 2.10-9.16) and 2-fold as likely to have GAD-7 scores of moderate to severe anxiety (aOR, 2.07; 95% CI, 1.04-4.11) or report thoughts of self-harm or suicide in the prior 2 weeks (aOR, 2.06; 95% CI, 1.08-3.93). High resilience scores (ie, \geq median), compared with low resilience scores (ie, $<$ median), were associated with lower odds of moderate or severe anxiety (aOR, 0.51; 95% CI, 0.26-0.999).

There were no statistically significant temporal trends in the bivariate model or model 1 (Table 2 and Table 3). However, among all participants, odds of moderate to severe depression increased at 3 months of follow-up relative to baseline (aOR, 2.12; 95% CI, 0.98-4.60), which was not a significant increase, and returned to baseline levels at months 6 and 12 (Figure) prior to adjusting for receipt of PBs or GAHs.

We also examined the association between receipt of PBs or GAHs and mental health outcomes in bivariate and multivariable models (eFigure 2 in the Supplement). After adjusting for temporal trends and potential confounders (Table 4), we observed that youths who had initiated PBs or GAHs had 60% lower odds of moderate to severe depression (aOR, 0.40; 95% CI, 0.17-0.95) and 73% lower odds of self-harm or suicidal thoughts (aOR, 0.27; 95% CI, 0.11-0.65) compared with youths who had not yet initiated PBs or GAHs. There was no association between receipt of PBs or GAHs and moderate to severe anxiety (aOR, 1.01; 95% CI, 0.41-2.51). After adjusting for time-varying exposure of PBs or GAHs in model 2 (Table 4), we observed statistically significant increases in moderate to severe depression among youths who had not received PBs or GAHs by 3 months of follow-up (aOR, 3.22; 95% CI, 1.37-7.56). A similar trend was observed for self-harm or suicidal thoughts among youths who had not received PBs or GAHs by 6 months of follow-up (aOR, 2.76; 95% CI, 1.22-6.26). Lastly, we estimated E-values of 2.56 and 3.25 for the association between receiving PBs or GAHs and moderate to severe depression and suicidality, respectively (eTable 4 in the Supplement). Sensitivity analyses obtained comparable results and are presented in eTables 5 through 8 in the Supplement.

Discussion

In this prospective clinical cohort study of TNB youths, we observed high rates of moderate to severe depression and anxiety, as well as suicidal thoughts. Receipt of gender-affirming interventions, specifically PBs or GAHs, was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate to severe depressive symptoms and 73% lower odds of self-harm or suicidal thoughts during the first year of multidisciplinary gender care. Among youths who did not initiate PBs or GAHs, we observed that depressive symptoms and suicidality were 2-fold to 3-fold higher than baseline levels at 3 and 6 months of follow-up, respectively. Our study results suggest that risks of depression and suicidality may be mitigated with receipt of gender-affirming medications in the context of a multidisciplinary care clinic over the relatively short time frame of 1 year.

Our findings are consistent with those of prior studies finding that TNB adolescents are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidality^{11,32} and studies finding long-term and short-term improvements in mental health outcomes among TNB individuals who receive gender-affirming medical interventions.^{14,21,24,33,34} Surprisingly, we observed no association with anxiety scores. A recent cohort study of TNB youths in Dallas, Texas, found that total anxiety symptoms improved over a longer follow-up of 11 to 18 months; however, similar to our study, the authors did not observe

Table 2. Baseline Factors Associated With Mental Health Outcomes in Bivariate Models

Factor	Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥10) ^a		Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥10) ^b		Any self-harm or suicidal thoughts ^c	
	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value
PBs or GAHs	0.67 (0.33-1.34)	.25	0.90 (0.49-1.66)	.74	0.47 (0.26-0.86)	.01
Time, mo						
0 (baseline)	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
3	1.96 (0.99-3.90)	.05	1.46 (0.71-2.97)	.30	1.00 (0.49-2.06)	.99
6	1.01 (0.46-2.19)	.99	0.77 (0.39-1.52)	.45	1.22 (0.64-2.34)	.54
12	1.42 (0.55-3.66)	.47	0.95 (0.43-2.06)	.89	1.02 (0.41-2.52)	.97
Gender						
Male or transgender male	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
Female or transgender female	1.07 (0.51-2.24)	.87	3.15 (0.92-10.8)	.07	1.20 (0.55-2.64)	.64
Nonbinary or gender fluid	2.40 (0.84-6.87)	.10	1.35 (0.67-2.72)	.40	2.17 (0.73-6.41)	.16
Race or ethnicity						
White	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
Member of minority race or ethnic group ^d	1.08 (0.51-2.28)	.84	0.86 (0.45-1.66)	.66	0.92 (0.53-1.61)	.77
Age, y						
13-15	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
16-17	1.79 (0.82-3.88)	.14	0.63 (0.29-1.39)	.25	0.86 (0.44-1.68)	.66
18-20	0.78 (0.24-2.51)	.68	1.17 (0.43-3.17)	.76	0.79 (0.36-1.74)	.55
Mental health and substance use at baseline						
Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥10)	27.2 (13.4-55.4)	<.001	1.91 (0.85-4.29)	.12	1.06 (0.50-2.24)	.88
Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥10)	4.90 (2.27-10.6)	<.001	14.3 (7.31-27.9)	<.001	1.44 (0.76-2.72)	.27
Self-harm or suicidal thoughts	1.32 (0.61-2.85)	.48	1.49 (0.73-3.06)	.28	18.9 (10.4-34.1)	<.001
Receiving mental health therapy	1.46 (0.69-3.08)	.32	0.65 (0.31-1.38)	.26	0.75 (0.36-1.56)	.45
Tension with caregivers about gender identity or expression	1.93 (0.90-4.14)	.09	1.06 (0.52-2.15)	.87	1.55 (0.88-2.74)	.13
Any substance use	4.38 (2.10-9.16)	<.001	2.07 (1.04-4.11)	.04	2.06 (1.08-3.93)	.03
Resilience at baseline (CD-RISC 10 ≥22.5) ^e	0.85 (0.42-1.74)	.67	0.51 (0.26-1.00)	.05	0.74 (0.39-1.44)	.38

Abbreviations: aOR, adjusted odds ratio; CD-RISC 10, Connor-Davidson 10-item Resilience Scale; GAD-7, Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale; GAH, gender-affirming hormone; NA, not applicable; PB, puberty blocker; PHQ-9, Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale.

^a Bivariate models are adjusted for baseline PHQ-9.

^b Bivariate models are adjusted for baseline GAD-7.

^c Bivariate models are adjusted for self-harm or suicidal thoughts reported at baseline.

^d Owing to small sample sizes, this group includes Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Latinx, and Native American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian youths and youths who reported more than 1 race or ethnicity.

^e The median (range) CD-RISC score for the cohort was 22.5 (1-38).

statistically significant improvements in generalized anxiety.²² This suggests that anxiety symptoms may take longer to improve after the initiation of gender-affirming care. In addition, Olson et al²⁵ found that prepubertal TNB children who socially transitioned did not have increased rates of depression symptoms but did have increased rates of anxiety symptoms compared with children who were cisgender. Although social transition and access to gender-affirming medical care do not always go hand in hand, it is noteworthy that access to gender-affirming medical care and supported social transition appear to be associated with decreased depression and suicidality more than anxiety symptoms.

Time trends were not significant in our study; however, it is important to note that we observed a transient and nonsignificant worsening in mental health outcomes in the first several months of care among all participants and that these outcomes subsequently returned to baseline by 12 months. This is consistent with findings from a 2020 study²⁶ in an academic medical center in the northwestern US that observed no change in TNB adolescents' GAD-7 or PHQ-9 scores from intake to first follow-up appointment, which occurred a mean of 4.7 months apart. Given that receipt of PBs or GAHs was associated with protection against depression and suicidality in our study, it could be that delays in receipt of medications is associated with initially exacerbated mental health symptoms that subsequently improve. It is also possible that mental health improvements associated with receiving these interventions may have a delayed onset, given the delay in physical changes after starting GAHs.

Few of our hypothesized confounders were associated with mental health outcomes in this sample, most notably receipt of ongoing mental health therapy and caregiver support; however, this is not surprising given that these variables were colinear with baseline mental health, which we adjusted for in all models. Substance use was the only variable associated with all mental health outcomes. In addition, youths with high baseline resilience scores were half as likely to experience moderate to severe anxiety as those with low scores. This finding suggests that substance use and resilience may be additional modifiable factors that could be addressed through multidisciplinary gender-affirming care. We recommend more granular assessment of substance use and resilience to better understand support needs (for substance use) and effective support strategies (for resilience) for TNB youths in future research.

This study has a number of strengths. This is one of the first studies to quantify a short-term transient increase in depressive symptoms experienced by TNB youths after initiating gender-affirming

Table 3. Temporal Trends in Mental Health Outcomes in Multivariable Model I*

Factor	Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥ 10)		Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥ 10)		Any self-harm or suicidal thoughts	
	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value
Time, mo						
0 (baseline)	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
3	2.12 (0.98-4.60)	.06	1.50 (0.71-3.15)	.29	0.99 (0.48-2.06)	.98
6	0.99 (0.42-2.35)	.98	0.78 (0.38-1.59)	.49	1.22 (0.63-2.36)	.56
12	1.27 (0.44-3.67)	.66	0.96 (0.43-2.11)	.91	0.98 (0.39-2.48)	.97
Mental health and substance use at baseline						
Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥ 10)	18.5 (8.44-40.5)	<.001	NA	NA	NA	NA
Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥ 10)	3.63 (1.83-7.19)	<.001	12.4 (6.25-24.7)	<.001	NA	NA
Self-harm or suicidal thoughts	NA	NA	NA	NA	19.9 (10.9-36.1)	<.001
Any substance use	3.35 (1.56-7.18)	.002	2.21 (1.09-4.49)	.03	2.07 (1.09-3.93)	.03
Resilience at Baseline (CD-RISC 10 ≥ 22.5) ^b	NA	NA	0.48 (0.24-0.95)	.04	NA	NA

Abbreviations: aOR, adjusted odds ratio; CD-RISC 10, Connor-Davidson 10-item Resilience Scale; GAD-7, Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale; NA, not applicable; PHQ-9, Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale.

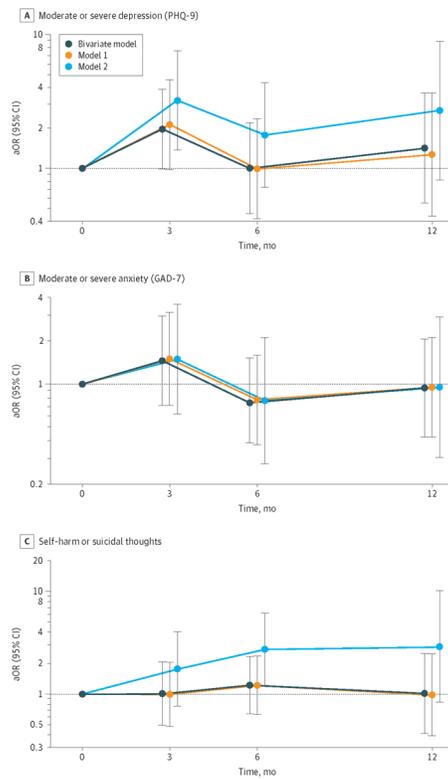
* Model I includes categorical temporal variables (ie, months 3, 6, and 12 relative to baseline) and covariates that were statistically significant in bivariate models (such that

95% CIs did not contain 1.00) (see Table 2). Covariates that were not significant in bivariate models are marked NA.

^b The median (range) CD-RISC score for the cohort is 22.5 (1-38).

care, a phenomenon observed clinically by some of the authors and described in qualitative research.³⁷ Although we are unable to make causal statements owing to the observational design of the study, the strength of associations between gender-affirming medications and depression and suicidality, with large aOR values, and sensitivity analyses that suggest that these findings are robust to moderate levels of unmeasured confounding. Specifically, E-values calculated for this study suggest that the observed associations could be explained away only by an unmeasured confounder that was associated with both PBs and GAHs and the outcomes of interest by a risk ratio of 2-fold to 3-fold each, above and beyond the measured confounders, but that weaker confounding could not do so.³¹

Figure. Temporal Trends in Mental Health Outcomes



Outcomes are estimated from bivariate and multivariable generalized estimating equation models. aOR, indicates adjusted odds ratio; GAD-7, Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale; PHQ-9, Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale; whiskers, 95% CIs.

Limitations

Our findings should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. This was a clinical sample of TNB youths, and there was likely selection bias toward youths with supportive caregivers who had resources to access a gender-affirming care clinic. Family support and access to care are associated with protection against poor mental health outcomes, and thus actual rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality in nonclinical samples of TNB youths may differ. Youths who are unable to access gender-affirming care owing to a lack of family support or resources require particular emphasis in future research and advocacy. Our sample also primarily included White and transmasculine youths, limiting the generalizability of our findings. In addition, the need to reapproach participants for consent and assent for the 12-month survey likely contributed to attrition at this time point. There may also be residual confounding because we were unable to include a variable reflecting receipt of psychotropic medications that could be associated with depression, anxiety, and self-harm and suicidal thought outcomes. Additionally, we used symptom-based measures of depression, anxiety, and suicidality; further studies should include diagnostic evaluations by mental health practitioners to track depression, anxiety, gender dysphoria, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts during gender care.²

Conclusions

Our study provides quantitative evidence that access to PBs or GAHs in a multidisciplinary gender-affirming setting was associated with mental health improvements among TNB youths over a relatively short time frame of 1 year. The associations with the highest aORs were with decreased suicidality, which is important given the mental health disparities experienced by this population, particularly the high levels of self-harm and suicide. Our findings have important policy implications, suggesting that the recent wave of legislation restricting access to gender-affirming care¹⁹ may have significant negative outcomes in the well-being of TNB youths.²⁰ Beyond the need to address antitransgender legislation, there is an additional need for medical systems and insurance providers to decrease barriers and expand access to gender-affirming care.

Table 4. Association Between GAHs or PBs and Mental Health Outcomes in Multivariable Model 2^a

Factor	Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥10)		Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥10)		Any self-harm or suicidal thoughts	
	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value	aOR (95% CI)	P value
PBs or GAHs	0.40 (0.17-0.95)	.04	1.01 (0.41-2.51)	.98	0.27 (0.11-0.65)	.003
Time, mo						
0 (baseline)	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA	1 [Reference]	NA
3 mo	3.22 (1.37-7.56)	.007	1.49 (0.62-3.59)	.37	1.77 (0.76-4.13)	.19
6 mo	1.77 (0.72-4.37)	.21	0.77 (0.28-2.11)	.61	2.76 (1.22-6.26)	.02
12 mo	2.71 (0.82-8.95)	.10	0.95 (0.31-2.93)	.93	2.93 (0.83-10.4)	.10
Mental health & substance use at baseline						
Moderate or severe depression (PHQ-9 ≥10)	19.4 (8.64-43.4)	<.001	NA	NA	NA	NA
Moderate or severe anxiety (GAD-7 ≥10)	3.82 (1.87-7.82)	<.001	12.4 (6.25-24.7)	<.001	NA	NA
Self-harm or suicidal thoughts	NA	NA	NA	NA	23.9 (12.9-44.5)	<.001
Any substance use	3.20 (1.49-6.84)	.003	2.21 (1.09-4.50)	.03	2.00 (1.08-3.73)	.03
Resilience at baseline (CD-RISC 10 ≥22.5) ^b	NA	NA	0.48 (0.24-0.95)	.04	NA	NA

Abbreviations: aOR, adjusted odds ratio; CD-RISC 10, Connor-Davidson 10-Item Resilience Scale; GAD-7, Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-Item scale; GAH, gender-affirming hormone; NA, not applicable; PB, puberty blocker; PHQ-9, Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item scale.

^a Model 2 includes a time-varying exposure variable measuring the receipt of PBs or GAHs adjusted for temporal trend (ie, categorical variable for months 3, 6, and 12

relative to baseline) and covariates that were statistically significant in the bivariate models (such that 95% CIs did not contain 1.00) (see Table 2). The unadjusted bivariate associations between PBs or GAHs and mental health outcomes are reported in Table 2. Covariates that were not significant in bivariate models are marked NA.

^b The median (range) CD-RISC score for the cohort is 22.5 (1-38).

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SUPPLEMENT

eTable 1. Survey Instruments

eTable 2. Prevalence of Exposure Over Time

eTable 3. Prevalence of Outcomes Over Time by Exposure Group

eTable 4. E-Value Calculation for Association Between Puberty Blockers or Gender-Affirming Hormones and Mental Health Outcomes

eTable 5. Examining Association Between Puberty Blockers or Gender-Affirming Hormones and Mental Health Outcomes Separately

eTable 6. Bivariate Model Restricted to Youths Ages 13 to 17 Years

eTable 7. Multivariable Model Restricted to 90 Youths Ages 13 to 17 Years

eTable 8. Sensitivity Analyses using Patient Health Questionnaire 8-item Scale Score of 10 or Greater for Moderate to Severe Depression

eFigure 1. Schematic of Generalized Estimating Equation Model

eFigure 2. Association Between Receipt of Gender-Affirming Hormones or Puberty Blockers and Mental Health Outcomes

eReferences



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Questions for the Record

**Full Committee Hearing:
"American Education in Crisis"
February 8, 2023
10:00 a.m.**

Representative Mary Miller (R-IL):

Please provide a response to each of the following questions:

1. Governor Polis, do you think it's appropriate for an adult teacher to talk to an 8-year-old girl about changing her gender?

As I mentioned during my testimony, what's important is that teachers meet the academic needs of all learners, all students, no matter who they are. Students need to learn math, reading and writing. And students need to involve the parents in making sure that kids are able to get the education they need, no matter what a person's faith is, no matter what their gender is, or no matter any of the other great aspects of diversity that make our country a stronger place.

2. Should schools hide discussions between adult teachers and their 10-year-old students about gender transition from parents?

My response remains the same as my testimony and per what is written above.

3. Do parents have a right to know if adult teachers are talking to their 10-year-old elementary school children about sexual orientation?

My response remains the same as my testimony and per what is written above.

4. Can you see why parents would be upset if adult teachers were talking to their 8-year-old children about their sexual orientation?

My response remains the same as my testimony and per what is written above.

Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ):

1. Governor Polis, even before the pandemic, many states and districts faced teacher shortages. This is particularly true for high-poverty districts and for hard to staff subject areas like special education, English learner education, math, and science. Additionally, many districts struggle to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce.
 - How are you addressing the teacher shortage in Colorado, particularly in schools that have historically experienced high rates of teacher turnover?
 - What strategies are you using to ensure that as you address the teacher shortage, you are also ensuring that you work to diversify the teacher workforce?

Thank you, Representative Grijalva, for this important question. Teachers remain the number one most important factor when it comes to the in-school success of our students and we need high quality teachers in the classroom now more than ever.

In Colorado, we are proud to be working with our teachers to come up with a variety of solutions to help address some of the challenges that have made it harder to staff our classrooms. This includes expanding the Temporary Educator Loan Forgiveness Program we set up during COVID; Having Colorado join the newly-created Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact that will make it easier for teachers to move across state lines with fewer hoops to jump through, especially our military families; Expanding new pathways into the classroom like teacher apprenticeships; and The Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado AmeriCorps teams are collaborating right now to use ESSER funds to provide AmeriCorps members serving as tutors in Colorado schools the opportunity to leverage their tutoring experience to gain their alternative teacher licenses and become full time teachers.

We also recognize the importance of creating a more diverse pipeline of teachers. We are proud that Metropolitan State University in Denver just received \$1.5 million from the Department of Education through the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program to diversify the teacher pipeline in Colorado by increasing completion rates of traditionally underrepresented students.

Representative Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (D-MP)

1. I have long been a strong proponent of educating and preparing individuals to meet the needs of the workforce, while also encouraging them and providing them with the tools to achieve their full potential. To that end, I have led several pieces of legislation targeted at expanding education and career training services in the Marianas. Governor Polis, a 2017 impact study found that intensive career services funded by WIOA were effective in increasing earnings of individuals receiving these services. In some cases, individuals were earning up to 20 percent more than they otherwise would have.
 - Are you seeing the same kind of effect with the recipients of intensive or individualized career services in Colorado?
 - Which career services are most impactful and why do you think they make a difference?
 - What kind of funding do you need to offer these services to more workers?

Representative Sablan, I applaud your efforts to expand education and career training services in the Marianas. All workers should have both the skills and services they need to thrive. Intensive career services, including those funded by WIOA, can play a key role in helping workers earn at their full potential. To ensure that states can offer these services to workers, providing governors and state workforce agencies with flexible funding to continue to direct investments towards our own unique in-demand workforce needs, including wraparound services, is essential.



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Questions for the Record

**Full Committee Hearing:
"American Education in Crisis"
February 8, 2023
10:00 a.m.**

Representative Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA)

Dr. Monty Sullivan:

1. I represent Pennsylvania's Fifteenth Congressional District, which covers eighteen counties and about one-third of the landmass of Pennsylvania. Through this area, I represent a number of workforce development programs, including career and technical centers, and a handful of community colleges. As you mentioned in your testimony, we must "ensure our nation's system of education and workforce development can provide the skills that individuals will need to succeed in our ever-changing economy." I could not agree more with you. As co-chair of the House bipartisan Career and Education Caucus, I am strong advocate for CTE programs that provide learners of all ages with career-ready skills. In fact, I introduced a resolution last week recognizing February as National CTE Month. This resolution shines a light on the benefits of a skills-based education and the valuable contributions CTE students make to the American workforce. In your testimony, you mentioned expanding Pell grants to cover short-term programs. I appreciate you specifically mentioning the Promoting Employment and Lifelong Learning or PELL Act, which I am proud to support. In order for our workforce to keep up with our nation's dynamic needs, we must give students the tools align their educational opportunities to career advancement. And the PELL Act does just that.
 - Can you further expand on what Louisiana is doing to ensure students who enter short-term programs are able to find job placement upon graduation?

Answer: Thank you for the question! Your question demonstrates a point that I believe is critical as an underpinning the entire issue. Education across the last three hundred years has changed in terms of its purpose as the nation now requires (economically) that people must get some form of education or skills beyond high school to make a living. And the

job and the subsequent career, is the broader goal of every student. Overall, 94-96% of graduates of a short-term credential at our colleges show up in the wage data file here in Louisiana. And we also know that students who complete these short-term credentials earn on average about \$48,500. In fact, these graduates out earn our credit graduates by about \$4-5,000 in first year earnings. Bottom line is that students who complete these credentials have a path to the middle class. But that first credential simply gets you in the door. Additional education and training will determine that graduates career trajectory.

Our work around ensuring job placement scraps the old notion that we produce a class of graduates and then show them off to prospective employers. If we wait until this point, we have missed a huge opportunity. Our work with industry partners begins long before we offer a class. The class and its content is largely a discussion with industry partners. As such, when employers see a graduate from a program, they know from their work in partnership with the college the skills the graduate has. Further, the classes often involve an earn-while-you-learn component that gives employers even further evidence of the quality of our graduates. Finally, in an effort to ensure continuous alignment of program offerings to the job market, we have adopted a star rating system that analyzes program offerings and graduate outcomes. The system rates occupation by demand and earnings. The star rating system has five stars with one star being the lowest demand and earnings. Five star is the highest demand and earnings. This approach allows policy makers like Board members to have a quantitative measure of programmatic performance on behalf of the student.

Congresswoman Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR)

Dr. Monty Sullivan:

1. Dr. Sullivan, how can we cut red tape and simplify the process for a worker who wants to enroll in a skills-development program offered through a local employer or aligned with an in-demand job?

Answer: College or education/training obtained regardless of the source should be easy. As a nation, we still have about 37.5% of our adults 25-64 not participating in the workforce. A portion of this challenge is precisely because of the arduous processes in place to access education and training programs.

Today, all too often getting into the program may be more difficult than the education and skills needed to pass the class. We collectively can cut the red tape by scrapping some of the old standards such as the 16-week semester, or the production model as outlined in the response to question 1 above. Successful completion of the FAFSA is arguably grounds for demonstrated college level skill and education. The point: completion of the FAFSA should result in institutions providing prospective students with a postsecondary credential. Why do we continue to place the highest bureaucratic hurdle in front of students with the least skillset and resources to accomplish the work. If our intent is truly to educate and skill every American, then we need to

seriously discontinue all of the multitude of “qualifying” for benefits. One example, if you qualify for Medicaid as determined by the Louisiana Department of Health, why should that student need to “requalify” for benefits. Allow the benefits test that has already been cleared to accomplish that bureaucratic step. Bottom line, if an American wants to go to get additional education and skills, shouldn’t we be working to get them there with fewer hurdles, not more.

2. Dr. Sullivan, what is Louisiana doing to ensure that short-term workforce programs are staying relevant to industry needs, and how quickly can these programs react when there is a shift in the economy?

Answer: In an effort to ensure continuous alignment of program offerings to the job market, we have adopted a star rating system that analyzes program offerings and graduate outcomes. The system rates occupation by demand and earnings. The star rating system has five stars with one star being the lowest demand and earnings. Five star is the highest demand and earnings. This approach allows policy makers like Board members to have a quantitative measure of programmatic performance on behalf of the student.

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3. Dr. Sullivan, working families dream of financial stability and building generational wealth for their kids and grandkids. It sounds like short-term workforce programs provide a solid foundation for those dreams. Have you seen that unfold in the lives of your former students?

Answer: As a nation, we have sixty-four million working-age adults with a high school diploma or less. This group is largely marginalized and trapped in an economy that they can only see and cannot be a part of. In order to join this economy, this population needs education and skills that will allow them to go to work and take care of their family- the first step toward joining America’s middle class.

The job, and the subsequent career, is the broader goal of every student. We need everyone to understand that role and responsibility. Students do not attend our colleges to “find themselves.” Instead, they attend our colleges to find a better life. And a job and career are central to that goal. Overall, 94-96% of graduates of a short-term credential at our colleges show up in the wage data file here in Louisiana. And we also know that students who complete these short-term credentials earn on average about \$48,500. In fact, these graduates out earn our credit graduates by about \$4-5,000 in first year earnings. Bottom line is that students who complete these credentials have a path to the middle class. But that first credential simply gets you in the door. Additional education and training will determine that graduates career trajectory.



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Questions for the Record

**Full Committee Hearing:
"American Education in Crisis"
February 8, 2023
10:00 a.m.**

Representative Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA)

1. You mentioned in your testimony that higher education must meet the needs of the workforce. I commend the work you are doing at Western Governors University by improving the relevancy of credentials and offering only degree programs and certifications that lead into high quality in-demand jobs.
 - Can you elaborate on how Western Governors University uses data and workforce trends to plan and implement your curriculum?

A: We leverage real-time input from program advisory councils with representation from employers, associations, workforce, and academia. Also, at a geo-specific level, we map the skills and competencies WGU students acquire to real-world jobs and translate credentials into the high-demand skills they represent. This is facilitated through a partnership with Lightcast, a leading labor market analytics firm that maintains an Open Skills Library identifying nearly 30,000 skills from hundreds of millions of job postings, résumés, and professional profiles. This labor market intelligence enables us to tailor our offerings even further, and to update them over time to ensure our offerings remain current and focused on the specific skills and competencies that match a learner's career goals. Additionally, we design assessment to validate student proficiency against the learning outcomes that map to the skills for high demand roles. This transparency enables students to better demonstrate their capabilities with current and prospective employers.

Responses to Questions for the Record
Virginia Gentles
Director, Education Freedom Center
Independent Women's Forum

Full Committee Hearing:
"American Education in Crisis"
February 8, 2023
10:00 a.m.

Representative Elise Stefanik (R-NY)

1. In your testimony you mention the recent NAEP scores and the significant decline in student reading ability, and the first ever documented decline in math.
 - The American Rescue Plan alone in some cases spent more than double our annual average per student, yet we see declining results. What is not working here and how do we correct our course to best address this?

Even before the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) [scores](#) were released, research had revealed that lengthy school closures, disrupted learning, and deplorable remote instruction, often imposed upon students in response to teachers unions' demands, resulted in alarming [declines in reading and math scores](#). It's important to acknowledge that students entered the pandemic with weak academic skills, with only [one-third of students reading proficiently](#) and less than one-quarter of 12th graders proficient in math in 2019. Covid-era education policies accelerated a disaster already in progress and compounded the literacy crisis, lowered math achievement, and disproportionately impacted the youngest students, low-income and minority students, and students with disabilities.

In addition, states like Virginia quietly lowered academic standards, masking students' struggles and preventing parents from realizing their children were not learning reading or math. In 2017, before the Virginia State Board of Education lowered state reading standards, 43% of fourth-grade students tested at the proficient level on the NAEP reading test. While not an impressive percentage, it exceeded the 2017 national average of 35% proficient. According to 2022 NAEP [results](#), only 32% of both the nation's and Virginia's students are currently proficient readers.

Although states and school districts received \$190 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, much of the funding remains unspent or was invested unwisely. Districts should prioritize the students with highest need, especially the young students still struggling to read, and invest in intensive high-dosage tutoring and summer school programs with proven track records. The state of Indiana, for example, measured the impact on learning of summer learning programs, and state leaders intend to focus funding on approaches that positively impact students academically. States and districts should provide learning loss microgrants to parents so that they can choose from an array of academic supports and direct funding to the tutoring, after school or summer program, or enrichment options that best meets their child's needs.

- What concerning trends in schools have you seen further exacerbated since these lockdowns that impact future educational attainment?

I regularly speak with parents who are perplexed by the lack of homework and discipline in their children's schools. The country's [learning loss crisis](#) is an undeniable reality that many schools appear determined to exacerbate by lowering academic standards, expecting less from students, prioritizing activism over academics, and refusing to address chaotic classrooms that prevent teachers from teaching and students from learning. Too many school districts insist on embracing progressive education fads like "standards-based grading," which removes A-F grades, and [debunked](#) "whole-language" or "balanced literacy" reading programs. Our nation's students will never recover lost learning if districts continue to chase fads, rather than prioritize academic instruction.

- What impact does this learning loss have for students down the line in their education?

The Covid-era closures and excessive quarantine policies significantly disrupted learning and caused students to miss out on opportunities to develop age-appropriate social and behavioral skills. According to [McKinsey and Company analysis](#), "They are at risk of finishing school without the skills, behaviors, and mindsets to succeed in college or in the workforce." Too many students remained disengaged from learning with hundreds of thousands "missing," according to [Stanford University analysis](#), and likely no longer receiving an education. Districts across the country are reporting alarmingly high rates of chronic absenteeism, with students missing over 10% of instructional days. Half of [Chicago Public Schools](#) students were chronically absent last year, for example; double the pre-Covid rate. Covid-era policies condemned these children to low literacy skills, limited employment opportunities, higher rates of poverty and incarceration, and bleak futures. Education bureaucrats, superintendents and local and state leaders must acknowledge their mistakes and take drastic measures to teach literacy effectively and re-engage students in education.

2. Under the guise of equity, schools are doing away with merit-based achievement. Look no further than in Virginia, where at more than a dozen schools, students were not told about national merit awards that they rightfully earned.
 - In your experience, what impact does moving away from merit have on success for students?

Eliminating educational opportunities hurts students. The education system's failures in Virginia and elsewhere trap students in an environment that dismisses their achievements and potential, while prioritizing equity posturing over student success. No one benefits from an education in which excellence is meaningless and students are intentionally not challenged. My Independent Women's Forum colleague, Patrice Onwuka, recently [observed](#), "Today, as part of a war on merit in K-12 education, honors classes are eliminated, accelerated math is abandoned, admissions to selective high schools are relaxed, and high-school entrance exams are scrapped in the name of equity. Critics claim such programs contribute to racial segregation, although data suggest otherwise." Opponents of honors classes "ignore the Black and Hispanic students who stand to suffer from the elimination of gifted educational programming. Merit-based programs operate as burners lighting a fire under a gifted young person. Kids, especially those from low-income households and struggling minority homes, are pushed to the limits of their abilities in these programs, rather than being held back."

- Can you explain the importance of reprioritizing merit and keeping schools transparent and accountable to parents?

Students deserve to have their potential, talent, and accomplishments acknowledged, and every student should be challenged and encouraged to learn and achieve. In a transparent education system, parents can stay informed on the course offerings and curriculum provided by their schools. Parents across the nation are responding to school districts' quiet decisions to eliminate merit-based education by making their disapproval crystal clear. Patrick Henry High School in San Diego, California, for example, [reinstated honors](#) literature and history courses after concerned parents and students objected to the decision to quietly remove them. In Rhode Island, [parental outcry](#) resulted in school officials returning honors and "honors with distinction" English and social studies classes at Barrington High School.

School systems should not keep parents in the dark. Instead, they should disclose their curriculum, budget, safety procedures, and any violent activity that takes place on school grounds. In some schools, transparency is non-existent, and parents are barred from accessing information about instructional materials or how their tax dollars are being spent. Parents have a right to direct the upbringing, care, and education of their children. This means that parents, in collaboration with educators, should be involved in deciding what students are learning. Families should also be kept in the loop on the policies and safety procedures in place at their children's school.

Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ)

1. Ms. Gentles, you touted the success of Arizona's ESA program, but you did not mention the exploitation of the program with over 70 percent of enrollees having never attended public schools or reports of gay parents being excluded from their child's school – a private school that was receiving ESA funds. Does this sound like a successful program?

[According](#) to the Arizona Department of Education, as of February 13, 2023, 49% of the students participating in Arizona's Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) have transferred into the program from public schools. The number of students with prior public school attendance has been steadily increasing since the program began implementation of the universal ESA in August 2022. Because all students, regardless of current or prior school enrollment, are eligible, of course there initially would be a higher proportion of participating students from private schools. A private school simply had to send an email to existing families with the application link, whereas families with children enrolled in public schools had to embark on a multi-step process of learning about the program, researching their educational options, determining how to apply for the ESA, and transferring their child. Arizona's democratically-elected legislature and governor decided to amend the existing ESA law to allow all families to participate, whether or not their child was previously enrolled in a government-assigned public school. There is no "exploitation" involved.

The ESA program allows parents to make decisions about where to send their children to school. The relationship is between the family and the school, not the government and the school or education provider. In the [story](#) in question, a mother with the legal right to make education decisions for her child chose a school with specific, religious beliefs. No one is forced to choose a religious school that has values that differ from their own. We live in a free and pluralistic society and our education system should reflect that freedom and pluralism. That includes the freedom to create learning environments that stand for particular values. If a family doesn't share the values of a particular school, they are free to choose from among a myriad of other schools that share their values. The fact that the father of the child disagrees with the mother's choice is a matter for family court, not the Department of Education or the state legislature.

[Whereupon at 1:48 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

