

**THE IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM
CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC
SCHOOL TEACHERS: LOW PAY,
TEACHER SHORTAGES, AND
UNDERFUNDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

HEARING
OF THE
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS**
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

EXAMINING THE IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM CHALLENGES FACING
PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS, FOCUSING ON LOW PAY, TEACHER
SHORTAGES, AND UNDERFUNDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Thursday, June 20, 2024

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:04 a.m., in room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bernard Sanders, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Sanders [presiding], Casey, Baldwin, Kaine, Hassan, Hickenlooper, Markey, and Cassidy.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SANDERS

The CHAIR. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will come to order for a hearing on an issue of enormous consequence.

I want to thank all of our panelists and guests who are here with us this morning. And during the course of the morning, Senators will be coming in and out, but I know that this is an issue of interest to every Senator. In a moment, we will hear directly from educators from across our Country about the enormous effort it takes to provide a quality public education for every child in our Country.

In my view, if we are serious about the need for a bright and hopeful future for our Country, we must understand that the children, the young people of this country are our future. And there is, in fact nothing more, nothing more important that we can do than provide a quality education to all of our young people.

Yet, for decades, public school teachers have been overworked, underpaid, understaffed, and maybe most importantly, underappreciated. Compared to many other occupations, our public-school teachers are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout, which was only exacerbated by the pandemic.

As a result, nearly 8 percent of teachers leave their profession each and every year, double the rate in countries like Canada and many other countries around the world.

According to the most recent statistics, some 300,000 teaching positions, nearly 10 percent of all teaching positions nationwide, have been left vacant, or filled by teachers not fully certified for

their assignments. In addition, teacher turnover rates are 50 percent higher in school districts with high poverty rates than districts that serve wealthier students. In other words, the areas where we need the best teachers the most, are the areas where we're seeing the highest turnover.

Incredibly, 44 percent of public-school teachers are now quitting their profession within 5 years. Now why is that? Why are so many public-school teachers, people who came into the profession because of their love of kids, and their wanting to do the right thing, why are they leaving that profession? Why do we have a massive shortage of teachers in America?

Well, there are many reasons, but one of the primary reasons is the extremely low pay teachers receive. According to the statistics that I have seen, the average starting teacher salary in America is less than \$45,000 a year. Nearly 40 percent of school districts in our Country pay teachers a starting salary of less than \$40,000 a year.

Incredibly, the average public-school teacher in America is making nearly a hundred dollars a week, less than she or he did 28 years ago after adjusting for inflation. In other words, the real salaries of teachers are actually going down in inflation adjusted numbers.

Wages for public school teachers are so low that in 36 states throughout America, the average public-school teacher with a family of four qualifies for food stamps, public housing, or other government benefits.

In America today, nearly 20 percent of public-school teachers in our Country are forced to work two or three jobs during the school year. Maybe they're driving an Uber, maybe they're waiting tables, maybe they're parking cars. In the richest country in the history of the world, we have got to do a lot better than that.

Meanwhile, because of lack of resources and tight school budgets, about 80 percent of public-school teachers are forced to spend their own money on classroom supplies without being reimbursed, which comes out to about 13 percent of their first monthly paycheck.

The situation has become so absurd, and this tells us not just about how we feel about education and teachers, but maybe our sense of priorities as a Nation. The situation has become so absurd that 4 hedge fund managers on Wall Street made more money last year than every kindergarten teacher in America, nearly 120,000 teachers. Four hedge fund managers, more money than 120,000 kindergarten teachers.

Public school teachers should not be forced to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet. They should not be forced to be on food stamps. Further, as bad as everybody in this room knows it's not the teacher alone that keeps the classroom going, they need support service. And as bad as public-school teachers are paid, our Nation's school custodians, food service workers, and other school staff earn even less in America today. Nearly 40 percent of support staff in our public schools earn less than \$25,000 a year.

Now, it would seem to me that we would want as a nation to attract the best and the brightest people into the enormously impor-

tant profession of education. And if we're going to do that, if we're going to encourage teachers to teach in underserved communities, if we're going to improve teacher retention and morale, and if we're going to improve student academic outcomes, then in my view, we need to pay teachers in America decent wages and decent benefits. Not a very, I think, radical or controversial concept.

That is why I've introduced the Pay Teachers Act with nine of my colleagues in this Congress. This bill would make sure that no teacher in America is paid less than \$60,000 a year. It would increase wages for teachers who have made teaching their profession. Those who have been on the job for 10, 20, or 30 years. It would triple Title I funding, get money into those school districts that need it the most.

It would invest in Federal programs to provide teachers with the training, education, and preparation they need to succeed. And it would benefit every public school district in every state in our Country.

Now, here is the good news and it is very good news. And that is a result of local organizing led by public school teachers. Some states are beginning to do the right thing. In recent years, the State of New Mexico has increased teacher pay by an average of 20 percent. State of Maryland recently became the first state in the country to require all teachers to be paid a competitive salary that is at least \$60,000 a year by July 2026.

The State of Arkansas recently increased minimum teacher salaries from 36,000 a year to 50,000, and provided a minimum \$2,000 raise for all teachers during the 2023–2024 academic year. And the State of Mississippi recently increased teachers' pays by 11 percent.

Raising teacher salaries to at least 60,000 a year, and ensuring competitive pay for all of our teachers is one of the most important steps we can take to address the teacher shortage in America and to improve the quality of public education in our Country.

Bottom line, as everybody knows, the young people are our future, and we've got to deal with the reality that we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any major nation on earth, and that we are not attracting because of inadequate salaries the kinds of people we need into teaching.

Let me just conclude by thanking the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of teachers in this country. You are heroes, you are heroines. You are doing enormously important work. You are saving children's lives every single day, and I thank you very much for what you do.

Senator Cassidy.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CASSIDY

Senator CASSIDY. Thank you, Chair Sanders. I too thank the teachers. I still remember the names of all my elementary school teachers and particularly one who they all, I think, believed in a guy with a lot of ADD, a lone child who couldn't focus, who didn't read during the day. And so, one of them kept me afterwards and drove me home. Could you imagine that? She would drive me home after everybody had left, because my ADD would not allow me to

kind of focus. So, I just applaud all the teachers, you are formative in a child's experience.

But as we begin to speak about the current state of K–12 education, we have to recognize the world as it is. Two thirds of U.S. public school students don't read proficiently in fourth grade, 40 percent are essentially non-readers.

Almost two thirds of fourth graders, three quarters of eighth graders are below proficient in math. Less than half of public-school parents, say their child is definitely prepared academically for the next year. A related issue is the rising absenteeism. 28 percent of students miss nearly 4 weeks of the school year.

Now intuitively, but also borne out by research, students who miss more than 4 weeks have difficulty learning to read by third grade. Think about that. These are not middle schoolers or high schoolers skipping out when their parents are not watching. These are children less than their first, second, and third grade, and they're missing 4 weeks of school or more. And so, if you don't learn to read by third grade, you don't read to learn after that.

How did we get here? Well, in many places, primary and secondary education is broken. Schools have lost sight of their core mission of educating children. Some education leaders prioritize social agendas and progressive ideology over academic progress. This negatively impacts children's success. It leaves them ill prepared to enter a competitive workforce.

Now, parents, studies show, are the most important educators in their children's life. I think I read once that the mother is the most determinative of a child's future in academic success, which kind of illustrates, it's the hand that rocks the cradle, that rules the world.

But unfortunately, many parents feel as if they've been forced to be bystanders or even silenced by fear of retaliation from school leaders. In 2023, 72 percent of parents considered moving their children to a new school, a 35 percent increase from 2022.

Now, I have to point out that it's been more than a year and a half into this Congress, and we're just now having our first hearing on K–12 education. We are the Committee with jurisdiction over Federal K–12 funding, and we have a responsibility to examine this broken system.

Our kids will spend roughly 15,000 hours in school between kindergarten and 12th grade. If they are not learning, what are they doing? I'm not sure throwing more money at the problem is the solution. The Committee needs to determine root causes concerning the state of public education and how to fix it.

Now, one thing that cannot be ignored, we are spending more money per child on education than ever before in our Nation's history. So, if you look here, here's spending, here's inflation. So, spending has greatly exceeded inflation. But, even beginning before the pandemic, we saw a decrease in math scores and a decrease in reading scores. The reading is fourth grade, the math is eighth grade.

Now, in 2021, Democrats through a partisan bill gave \$121 billion in one-time Covid spending, with little accountability or re-

quirements for how the money would be used. And it begs the question, where was it spent? Some school districts added new faculty positions like assistant principals that have limited impact upon classroom learning. There are now more staff collecting paychecks at schools than ever before. And yet we see grades falling.

Now let's be clear. Teachers are important, for a child to learn they must have a teacher focused on teaching. But there's evidence, anecdotal, teachers are overwhelmed by policies that prevent them from truly managing classrooms and in some cases ensuring the safety of their students. We'll hear more about this from one of our witnesses today.

Now, the Democrat solution to this challenge has been to create a Federal minimum salary for teachers. Improving teacher pay is important. In fact, out of 11 states that passed laws this year increasing take home pay for teachers, 10 have Republican led legislatures, including Louisiana.

But the Federal Government dictating how states spend their money, does not address the root cause of why teachers are struggling to teach in the classroom. More mandates and funding cannot be the only answer we come up with. We must examine broken policies that got us here and find solutions to improve. This should not be the only hearing Congress has examining education.

We need to understand shortcomings in K-12 and commit to resolving them so kids can read and become productive citizens. With 11 legislative weeks left, it seems we're not going to get to this, but the longer we wait, the more students suffer. We need to be looking at different issues. For example, how to address the learning loss and severe mental health issues among adolescents as a result of COVID school closures.

We need to implement better strategies, like the science of reading, to address falling literacy rates so children can read properly and do not fall behind. We need to begin to scream for dyslexia, a condition which affects 20 percent of children, but when undiagnosed condemns the child to underperformance.

We need to address the negative impact of TikTok and social media on students and whether a phone shouldn't be in the classroom, and what were the costs of making school optional during the pandemic, as was done by many school districts across the Nation.

By the way, the Committee also hasn't had a hearing to address our broken higher education system. We should be discussing the botched rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, that delayed millions of students and families from accessing crucial financial aid information. Without this information, students don't know if and how they can afford college and may just decide not to attend.

We need to address the rising cost of college that is crushing students and families, forcing them to take on more loans which may or may not return on their investment. And we need to hold universities and the Biden administration accountable for the rising rate of antisemitism on campuses which have culminated in violence and chaos.

With the limited time left, we have this Congress, I urge the Chairman to prioritize how we can help our students and keep them from falling behind. Our children, our Country's future is at stake. With that I yield.

The CHAIR. We will now turn to our witnesses and we thank all of them for being here. Our first witness is Mr. John Arthur, the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year and National Teacher of the Year finalist. He's now entering his 12th year of teaching sixth grade at Meadowlark Elementary, a Title I school in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Mr. Arthur, thanks very much for being with us.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN ARTHUR, MAT, MED, NBCT, TEACHER,
MEADOWLARK ELEMENTARY, HOLLADAY, UT**

Mr. ARTHUR. Thank you, Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to share my love of teaching and insights from my classroom. My name is John Arthur, as you said. And again, I am the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year, a National Board-Certified Teacher, and a proud member of the National Education Association.

For the last 11 years, I have dedicated my professional life to uplifting and educating the children at Meadowlark Elementary, a Title I Public School in Salt Lake City.

As we consider the challenges facing public school teachers today, there is one statistic that worries me the most. The majority of American parents do not want their children to become teachers. My mother, who was a Korean immigrant, was one of those parents. Suka Arthur, like so many immigrant parents, wanted me to grow up to be a doctor or a lawyer.

When I finally worked up the courage to let my mother know that I was going to be a public-school teacher, she asked doctor-teacher? I said, no, ma', elementary school teacher. I don't want to read into the record what my mother said after that, but she was upset, not because she didn't respect teachers. Quite the opposite.

In Korea, teachers hold a position of high esteem and receive high pay, prestige, and respect. That's what my mom wanted for her son. That's what doctors and lawyers receive in the United States. And that's what I want for every public-school teacher in this country. High pay, prestige, and respect.

You used to be able to raise a family on a teacher's salary. Now, the only reason I'm able to be a public-school teacher is because my wife makes much more money than me. I appreciate the attention the Chairman brought to this issue through the Pay Teachers Act. And the No. 1 reason we have to appreciate when we're talking about root causes, like Senator Cassidy mentioned, the No. 1 reason teachers leave the profession is the pay.

The No. 1 reason parents don't want their children to become teachers, is the pay. So, the No. 1 solution to addressing the issues we face must be increasing teacher salaries.

In teaching, prestige is rooted in relationships and professional practices. And there is no relationship more important than the ones we build with our students and their families.

When I became a teacher, I knew I wanted to plant deep roots, teach in one school, and build powerful relationships with parents for the next 30 years. Sometimes when I'm writing really fast, I accidentally miswrite parents as partners because that's how I see them. I'd like to think in this moment, it's like the Oscars here, I'd like to thank every parent I've ever partnered with in my classroom.

We teachers also build communities of our own. In my first year of teaching, I saw teachers in my district step outside the comfort of their classrooms to advocate and champion the children in mines. I was inspired by them, and that's why I joined the Salt Lake Education Association, the Utah Education Association, and the National Education Association, because I wanted to be a champion for our public-school teachers and children just like them.

In my second year of teaching, I saw teachers delivering lessons and carrying on conversations with kids like conductors in an orchestra. And when I found out that they were all National Board-Certified Teachers, I said, I want that too.

I was immediately embraced by a community composed of our Country's most accomplished educators. I pursued my National Board certification and I learned that no teacher survives in isolation and thrives alone. In order to strengthen the teaching profession, we have to support and uplift the communities and organizations that make teachers strong.

Teachers are driven by a powerful need to be better for the children we serve. That's why we pursue advanced degrees and certifications. During my Master of Arts in Teaching program, I began working with two students. One of them had dyslexia and the other one had an emotional disturbance, had been identified in that way. I realized very quickly that I did not have the tools to support these kids the way they needed to be.

I already had one student loan going. So I said, rack it up, and I added a second master's degree program to my workload. I got a special education master's in education. And I recognize now that in order to increase the level of respect that people have for teachers, all we need to do is shine a spotlight on our best and brightest educators, elevating the excellence that America's teachers exemplify.

Senators, there are teachers in your home states that are right now leading from their classrooms. And all you have to do is show the public the wonders that they are and the hearts of even our harshest critics can be moved. You remember my mother, who did not want me to be a teacher just before she passed away, she left me this email. She said, "Hi son. This is Omma. I just want to say, I am so proud of you as a teacher. You're, a great teacher, you're a wonderful son. I love you."

I followed my heart into teaching and my love for teaching won my mother's heart too. We can do this. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Arthur follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN ARTHUR

Thank you, Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished Members of the Committee.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share this snapshot of my profession and my story with you today. My name is John Arthur, I am a National Board Certified Teacher, the 2021 Utah Teacher of the Year, and a proud member of the National Education Association. I have spent the last 11 years educating and uplifting children at Meadowlark Elementary, a Title I public school in Salt Lake City, and I can honestly say that despite the difficulties we face, I am still madly in love with teaching.

As we consider the challenges facing public school teachers today, there is one statistic that worries me the most is the majority of American parents *do not* want their kids to become teachers. In 2018, the percentage of parents who said they would like one of their children to become a public school teacher in their community fell below 50 percent for the first time in the U.S., and in 2022 that number dropped down to 37 percent (PDK International, 2022). As someone who has dedicated his professional life to public education, these numbers trouble me because we cannot sustain a healthy, effective public school system when so few parents want their kids to join me and my friends in the classroom. I am still hopeful that many of our youth will still choose teaching as their profession despite their parents' objections because I, too, was once that kid. My mom, who used to work here in the gift shop in our Nation's Capitol, did not want me to become a public school teacher. Suka Arthur immigrated to the U.S. from Korea shortly after marrying my father, Alan, a West Point graduate patrolling the DMZ. Like so many immigrant parents, my mom wanted me to grow up to be a doctor or a lawyer. Finally, in my late-twenties, I worked up the courage to tell my Omma that I was going to graduate school to become a teacher. After a long pause, she asked, "Doctor Teacher?"

I said, "No, Omma . . . elementary school teacher."

In Korea, teachers hold a position of high respect and esteem, rooted deeply in cultural and historical values. My mom recognized that here in the United States, public school teachers are treated differently, and more than anything she didn't want her son to have, what she considered, a hard life. And the fact that my mother was so desperate for me to become a doctor or lawyer tells you everything about how we as a society view those professions. Prestige. High pay. Respect.

That is what my mother wanted for me, and honestly that's what I want for myself and every other teacher in this country. I want that for my two little girls, who I desperately want to become public school teachers. I tell my daughters and every other kid who walks into my classroom that they ought to become teachers one day. I have this saying that I repeat constantly in my class:

"Children are the best people, teaching is the best job, and there's no better way to spend a day than in a classroom with kids!"

My 6th graders get excited (most days) when I get hyped about teaching and learning, which translates into their own higher quality and more joyful work. As public school teachers, we often squander the ultimate homecourt advantage when it comes to recruiting our Nation's top talent, our best and brightest students, into our profession. We have them in our classrooms for 13 years; posters promoting the teaching profession should hang on every wall, and our children should be hearing all the reasons we decided to become public school teachers every single day. And yet, like my mom, we often don't because we want to protect our children from what we know can be, even on the best of days, a hard life. That's why 52 percent of the teachers in our classrooms today wouldn't advise a young person to join our profession (Lin et al., 2024).

I recently presented at a special education conference, and in my keynote I told the teachers the same thing I tell my students:

"Children are the best people, teaching is the best job, and there's no better way to spend a day than in a classroom with kids!"

Afterward, a teacher approached me and said, "There is a part of me that resents your joy. I don't want to bring you down, but I'm going to ask this anyway—how are you thriving when I'm barely surviving?" His words broke my heart, and I know he's not alone. In 2022, only 12 percent of teachers reported being very satisfied with their job (Will, 2022). This year, the number of very satisfied teachers jumped up to 33 percent (Lin et al., 2024). And while that increase in job satisfaction might sound like good news, it belies the truth: satisfaction amongst our teachers isn't

going up, dissatisfied teachers are walking out the door. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, there were 567,000 fewer educators in public schools than there were before the pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022). I have watched Rock Star teachers leave the profession brokenhearted because they love their students, but they just cannot endure the low pay and disrespect any longer. One of them, a friend who earned his Master of Arts in Teaching with me, now works for an educational technology company. He recently walked into my classroom, not knowing it was mine, to show my grade-level team how to better use his product; when he saw me, his face went pale, and when he was leaving he told me he was afraid I'd be disappointed in him for having chosen more money and better working conditions over working with our kids.

"How are you thriving when I'm barely surviving?"

I had to think long and hard about that question before I found my answer. I think there are four things teachers need in order to thrive, even in these difficult times:

- Compensation
- Community
- Respect
- Room to Grow as Professionals

First: Compensation

The No. 1 reason teachers leave education is the pay. The No. 1 reason parents do not want their children to become teachers is the pay. That is why the first necessary step in revitalizing our teaching workforce must be increasing the pay for all teachers. We cannot continue to run our public education system on the backs of saints and martyrs. We must raise wages to the level at which we can successfully recruit and retain the talent we need to effectively educate all children, regardless of zip code.

You used to be able to raise a family in this country on just a teacher's salary. Now, I can afford to be a public school teacher because my wife makes much more money than me. If it wasn't for her, I would have long since joined the exhausted 20 percent of teachers who work a second job during the school year (Walker, 2019). Without her, I would look to the exit like the 48 percent of educators planning on leaving teaching due to compensation, or I would follow the 42 percent who already left for the same reason (Bryant et al., 2023).

I appreciate the attention that the Chairman has brought to raising teacher pay, and leaders in Utah have recognized the same need. In 2020, a report called *A Vision for Teacher Excellence* was released that called for average new teacher salaries in Utah to start at \$60,000 annually and grow to \$110,000 a year over the course of a career (Envision Utah, 2020). Envision Utah, a nonpartisan organization composed of our state's top community, business, and governmental leaders, declared that improving teacher compensation is likely the single-most effective and impactful strategy for better preparing Utah students for the future, and the same holds true for all our Nation's children.

Second: Community

When I became a teacher, I knew I wanted to plant deep roots and teach in the same school, serving the same neighborhood, for the next 30 years. At Meadowlark Elementary, I found that home. Besides working with my students, my favorite thing about teaching are the relationships I have developed with their parents and families. The relationship between teachers and parents is the cornerstone of a child's educational experience. I cherish the shared goals, open communication, collaboration, mutual support, and celebrations I get to share with my students' parents every year, and it's the community we have built together in my classroom that keeps me running back to school each fall.

Teachers who also connect with supportive communities of educators are more likely to remain in the teaching profession. As a first-year teacher, I was inspired to join the Salt Lake Education Association (SLEA), and thereby the Utah Education Association (UEA) and National Education Association (NEA), after watching teachers in my own district selflessly step outside the comfort of their classrooms to fight for greater funding and opportunities for the students in mine. I soon joined them in leading marches and speaking at rallies. In 2019, we rallied against a change to our district's salary schedule that would have increased starting salaries, but cost our teachers hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of our ca-

reers. In 2020, I delivered a speech to over 1,500 UEA members who had marched up the steps of our state capitol to insist our legislature raise our per pupil funding by 6 percent. And they did. The thrill of those actions taken together in community with my fellow public school teachers continues to inspire me and keeps me motivated in my work with students today.

I also draw inspiration from another community I am proud to belong to. When I pursued my National Board Certification, I was immediately embraced by our Country's most accomplished educators, without whose support and guidance I might not have made it through the pandemic. No teacher thrives alone or survives in isolation. To strengthen the teaching profession, we must support the communities and organizations that make teachers strong.

Third: Respect

A few years ago, my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. As scared as she was, my mom was most worried about my sister, who was in her mid-thirties and single at the time. Afraid my sister might end up alone forever, my mom asked me if I knew any single men in the DC area for her to date. I told her that a close friend of mine, the 2021 Washington DC Teacher of the Year, was a great guy and newly single. My mom thought about it, then said, "No." It took me a moment to realize what was wrong—even facing death, my mother still didn't want her daughter dating a teacher.

While teachers in the U.S. are appreciated by the majority of Americans, there is a negative narrative of the profession that is impacting our ability to recruit and retain highly qualified educators into the profession. One way to counter this negative perspective and boost the level of respect our public school teachers receive is to shine a spotlight on our best and brightest educators, thereby elevating excellence within our profession. I am the Co-Director of the Teacher Fellows, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization committed to developing the next generation of Utah teacher leaders. On our monthly podcast, we feature incredible classroom teachers and give them a platform to highlight the work they do with students and other educators they think the whole world needs to hear about. Amplifying stories like these is an easy way to flip the script on what it means to be a teacher in America.

Fourth: Room for Professional Growth

The last thing teachers need to thrive is room to grow as professionals. We are professionals. Driven by the need to be better for the children and families we serve, public school teachers everywhere pursue advanced degrees and additional credentials.

During my Master of Arts in Teaching program, I began working with a student with dyslexia and another identified with an emotional disturbance. I quickly realized I didn't have the tools to meet their needs, so I decided to add a second Master's degree in K-6 Mild/Moderate Special Education to my program. I am also certified to work with multilingual learners, and currently I am pursuing my Doctor of Education degree in Policy and Leadership—all so I can be a more effective 6th grade teacher.

I am also National Board Certified as a middle childhood generalist. National Board Certification is a voluntary, advanced certification that shows a teacher is an instructional expert in their subject and age range. It requires teachers to demonstrate a deep understanding of the content they teach by subject and age, the ability to meet individual student needs, develop strong relationships with students, families and colleagues, and maintain ongoing critical reflection of their practice. Similar to board certification in medicine, National Board Certification assures policymakers, parents, and the public that teachers have met the profession's highest standards. Over a decade of research has demonstrated that students taught by National Board Certified Teachers learn more than their peers. National Board Certified Teachers are also more likely to remain in the profession, leaving the classroom at just one-third the average rate. Over 137,000 teachers have achieved board certification in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, nearly half in high-need schools. I also mentor other teachers of color pursuing their National Board Certification, ensuring that, like me, they have the opportunity and support necessary to improve their practice and advance their careers.

We teachers are also taking the lead in bringing new teachers into the classroom. For example, in collaboration with the Salt Lake Education Foundation, I have helped start a pilot program at Meadowlark Elementary called *Our Community*,

Our Teachers, through which any school staff member, including our custodian or head secretary, can receive a scholarship to pursue a degree in education.

There are teachers in every school and district in our Nation proudly leading from their classrooms, and it is time we elevate the excellence that America's teachers exemplify. When we do, even the hearts of our harshest critics can be moved.

Just months before she passed, my mom left me this voicemail:

"Hi Son, this is Omma. I just want to say hi to you, how is everything going with you, and I am thinking of you. And I love you so much.

I just want to say I am so proud of you as a teacher. You are a great teacher, you are a wonderful son.

I love you so much."

I followed my heart into teaching, and eventually won my mom's heart, too. When we improve teacher pay, strengthen our communities, elevate the professionalism of our incredible educators, and provide greater opportunities for professional growth, then more young Americans will become teachers. Not despite their parents' wishes—to make their parents proud.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF JOHN ARTHUR]

Mr. Arthur's testimony will focus on his experience as an educator of 11 years at Meadowlark Elementary in Salt Lake City, Utah and as a parent of two young children.

John will highlight:

- the importance of prestige and satisfaction in the teaching profession;
- the difficult tradeoffs and sacrifices that educators have to make due to low pay and poor working conditions;
- the various efforts and credentials he holds to better support the diverse needs of a Title I school; and
- four components to ensuring educators can thrive: compensation, community, respect, and room to grow as professionals.

Key data points:

- Only 37 percent of parents in the U.S. would like their child to become a public school teacher.
- According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2022, there were 567,000 fewer educators in public schools than there were before the pandemic.
- 20 percent of teachers who work a second job during the school year.
- 48 percent of educators planning on leaving teaching due to compensation, and the 42 percent who already left for the same reason.
- Over 137,000 teachers have achieved board certification in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, nearly half in high-need schools.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

The CHAIR. Our next witness is Mr. Gemayel Keyes, a special education teacher at Gilbert Spruance Elementary School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a graduate of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, Paraprofessional to Teacher Program. Mr. Keyes, thank you very much for being with us.

**STATEMENT OF GEMAYEL KEYES, TEACHER, GILBERT
SPRUANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, PHILADELPHIA, PA**

Mr. KEYES. Thank you, Senator Sanders, and the Committee for addressing this critical issue. My name is Gemayel Keyes and I am an educator and a member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and AFT Local. On behalf of the PFT, the AFT and my col-

leagues, again, I want to thank you Chairman Sanders and the Committee for addressing this critical issue.

I teach middle-years special education in the third largest elementary school in Philadelphia. I was born and raised in Philadelphia and educated in Philadelphia public schools. I'm a product of teachers who molded me into a lifelong learner and have left an indelible mark on my life.

Just last week, after 18 years with the School District of Philadelphia, I completed my first year as a classroom teacher. While this is the third position I've held in my district, starting my career as a bus attendant, I've spent most of my career in education as a paraprofessional, and that's how I stumbled upon what I would find was my calling.

For the entirety of my 18-year career, I've worked in the same school primarily with students who have disabilities and complex needs. And I've worked alongside veteran teachers, all of whom are now retired. Those now retired veteran teachers told me that I was meant to be a teacher even when I didn't see it.

At the time I moved into my career as a paraprofessional. The starting salary was \$16,000 with the maximum salary of \$30,000 per year and it's still pretty much the same. For those of you who don't know, paraprofessionals work alongside teachers to keep the train on the track, so to speak. And they're essential for working with students who need additional attention and support. So, as I began to recognize that I did want to pursue a career as teaching, I also started looking into schooling.

My major concern with going to school was going into debt. I ultimately understood that it was necessary to get to where I needed to be in my career. I obtained my associate's degree in early childhood education with honors. I continued to earn my bachelor's degree in the same area.

At that time, I had the option to obtain my teaching certification while doing my coursework, but this also meant that I would have to take an unpaid leave from my job to complete the student teaching component. And this was something that I could not afford to do.

At the same time, my union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was in the early stages of negotiating our next contract. And I used this time to speak with my union leadership about my journey to becoming a teacher and some of the obstacles. It was from this meeting that the seeds for the Para Pathways program were planted.

As our district was facing vacancies my union and the district agreed that the best potential teachers were already working in classrooms, serving children daily as paraprofessionals, and that alleviating barriers would allow access to the teacher pathway. The Para Pathways program became part of our contract and eliminated as much of the financial burden as possible, ultimately making, obtaining a degree cost free for paraprofessionals in the program with the multi-year commitment for teaching in Philadelphia public schools.

Through the Pathways program, I entered the teacher residency program, which meant I would work for 1 year under a mentor teacher in a Title I school while taking coursework to obtain my master's degree in special education. Many don't understand that you're not only responsible for content, but you also take on many roles in the classroom based on the needs of your students. All starting with a salary of around \$45,000.

Teachers are constantly putting money back into the classroom for everything, from school supplies to snacks for hungry children. And just this school year alone, I've spent over a thousand dollars on those things, just so that I can be effective at what I do.

Even as a teacher, I still have an additional part-time job. On top of personal monetary contributions for teachers in special education, there's also hours of paperwork that cannot possibly be completed during the workday if we're expected to actually teach and work with our students.

According to a report in 2023, the PA Needs Teachers, it stated that there are 2015 teacher vacancies, this means that Philadelphia is facing a severe shortage. And at the start of next school year, there will be a hundred paraprofessionals who would have gone through the Pathways program. If there's no steady pipeline of teachers coming in from outside of this program, things won't change in my profession.

As a teacher, I wake up every day and make a choice to be an urban educator in a district where many of the school buildings are crumbling from decades of deferred maintenance and have issues with asbestos, and where many of my students have diverse needs.

I hope that school districts look at the success of the Pathways program and decide to invest in school employees, Grow Your Own programs. And I also hope that the Federal Government can make providing funding for those programs a priority, and invest in teachers like Senator Sanders Pay Our Teachers Act proposes with a starting salary of \$60,000. Other countries take their education seriously and they value their educators.

I hope that you guys in Congress, who are the policymakers and shape education in America, can do the same. Thank you for letting me share my experience with the Committee today, and I appreciate it.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Keyes follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GEMAYEL KEYES

My name is Gemayel Keyes, and I am an educator and a member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, an AFT local. On behalf of the PFT, the AFT and my colleagues and students, I want to thank Chairman Sanders and the Committee for addressing this critical issue.

I teach middle-years special education in a Philadelphia public school. I was born and raised in Philadelphia and educated in Philadelphia public schools. I am a product of the teachers who molded me into a lifelong learner and left an indelible mark on my life. Just last week, after 18 years with the School District of Philadelphia, I completed my first year as a classroom teacher. While this is the third position that I've held in the district, starting my career as a bus attendant, I've spent most of my career in education as a paraprofessional, and that's how I stumbled upon what I would come to find was my calling.

For the entirety of my 18-year career, I have worked in the same school, primarily with students who have disabilities and complex needs, and alongside veteran

teachers, all of whom are now retired. Those now-retired veteran teachers told me that I was meant to be a teacher, even when I didn't see it. They saw a gift in the way I was able to bond and build relationships with even the most challenging of students, getting them to work and complete tasks when others couldn't. As time progressed, I began to see what those veteran teachers saw and pondered the question of what could be next for my career.

At the time I moved into my career as a paraprofessional, the starting salary was \$16,000 and the maximum was \$30,000 per year. For those of you who don't know, paraprofessionals work alongside teachers in the classroom to help "keep the train on the tracks" when needed and are essential to working with students who need additional attention and support. Many paraprofessionals work multiple jobs just to keep their heads above water and stay a centimeter above the poverty line. As I began to recognize that I did want to pursue a career as a teacher, I also started looking into schooling. Seeing costs in comparison to my salary was off-putting, so much so that it caused me to delay going back to school for some time. Then my school's special education compliance manager presented me with a flier for a college program that was offered through a partnership with Harcum College and the district that accepted a limited number of paraprofessional applicants. However, this program did not include any type of direct financial assistance or commitment from the school district.

My major concern with going to school was going into debt, but I ultimately understood it was necessary to get to where I wanted to be in my career. I applied, was accepted into the program and obtained my associate degree in early childhood education, with honors. I continued to Eastern University to earn my bachelor's degree in the same area. While at Eastern, I had the option to obtain my teaching certification while doing my coursework, but this also meant that I would have to take unpaid leave from my job to complete the student-teaching component in a different school district from the one I work for. This was something I could not afford to do.

My situation was not unique, as I knew of several other paraprofessionals in the exact same boat—literally steps away from being able to teach but facing that same student-teaching hardship. At the same time in 2019, my union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, was in the early stages of negotiating our next contract, and I used this time to speak with my union leadership about my journey to become a teacher and some of the obstacles. It was from this meeting that the seeds for the Para Pathways program were planted. After 2020, our district was facing more vacancies than in the past, as many teachers had retired or left the profession over the course of the pandemic.

My union saw that the best potential teachers are already hard at work in classrooms serving children daily as paraprofessionals and that alleviating barriers would allow access to the teacher pathway. The Para Pathway program was a priority for my union and the district agreed. The district understood that paraprofessionals know the schools, live in the school community and share similar life experiences with our students. To make this happen, the school district agreed to make the Para Pathways program contractual and eliminate as much of the financial burden as possible, ultimately making obtaining a degree cost-free for paraprofessionals in the program with a multiyear commitment to teaching in Philadelphia schools.

Through the Para Pathways program, there are multiple pathways to teaching that are available to paraprofessionals based on their education level. Since I already had my bachelor's degree, I entered the Teacher Residency program, which meant I would spend 1 year working under a mentor teacher, in a Title I school, while taking coursework to obtain my master's degree in special education. Alongside me in the residency program were career-changers coming from every profession, ranging from corporate America to the military. All of us were following our passion to become educators. Many of my residency classmates, especially those coming from careers outside of education, were unprepared for what it meant to teach in urban public schools, and in under 2 years, a few had already quit due to burnout from the stresses that come along with the job.

Many don't understand that you are not only responsible for content but must take on many roles in the classroom based on the needs of your students, all with a starting salary of around \$45,000. Teachers are also constantly putting their own money back into their classroom, providing necessities for the job and their students' needs, like school supplies and snacks for hungry students. In just this school year, I spent over \$1,000 on classroom supplies so I could be effective.

But even as a teacher, I still have an additional part-time job. I can't even achieve the American dream of homeownership because of a high student debt-to-income

ratio—even though I have saved for a down payment and can qualify for a mortgage. Since I've been a paraprofessional, with a top income significantly less than a first-year teacher, I know the American dream is also out of reach for many of my colleagues. On top of the personal monetary contributions for teachers in special education, there's also hours of paperwork that cannot possibly be completed during work hours if we're expected to actually teach and work with our students.

The “PA Needs Teachers” report from 2023 stated that Philadelphia needed 2,015 teachers. This means that Philadelphia is in a severe teacher shortage. In my district, there are about 200 vacancies. At the start of the next school year, due to the Para Pathways program, 100 paraprofessionals will have earned teaching positions. But, if there is no steady pipeline of teachers coming in from outside of this program, things will not change for the profession.

We must invest in our teachers but also in our paraprofessionals. If we continue to underinvest in the pay and working conditions and don't match the responsibilities and job expectations, the paraprofessionals shortage will rise, the same way the pipeline of teachers has declined. I must also acknowledge and fully recognize that my job as a teacher would be impossible to do without my paraprofessional staff.

Each of us is here because a teacher taught us, inspired us, lit a spark and encouraged us to expand our minds, exploring our dreams. Becoming a bus assistant, a paraprofessional or a teacher is a respectable profession. As a teacher, I wake up every weekday and make a choice to be an urban educator in a district where many of our school buildings are crumbling due to decades of deferred maintenance and have issues with asbestos, and where many of our students have diverse needs.

I hope more school districts look at the success of Philadelphia's Para Pathways program and decide to invest in their school employees and offer a “grow-your-own” program. I also hope that the Federal Government can make providing funding for those programs a priority. Our counterparts in other countries take education seriously and invest in and respect their education professionals. Something must change, and that change can be driven by Congress, the policymakers who help shape what education in America looks like.

Thank you for letting me share my experience with the Committee today, and I welcome any questions.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF GEMAYEL KEYES]

Mr. Keyes' testimony will be about his experience as a first-year educator in special education and school district employee of 18 years in the School District of Philadelphia, including the importance of Philadelphia Federation of Teacher's “Para Pathways program.”

Key points will include:

- the role of veteran teachers in supporting and mentoring new educators;
- addressing teacher shortages through internal pathways to become teachers;
- challenges facing paraprofessionals and educators with low pay and high student debt;
- multiple roles and responsibilities educators are balancing; and
- the importance of teacher residency programs and retention in local communities.

Senator SANDERS. Thank you, Mr. Keyes, for all that you're doing and your testimony. Our next witness is Dr. William Kirwan, the Chancellor Emeritus of the University System of Maryland, and the former Chairman of the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education.

Dr. Kirwan, thanks very much for being with us.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM E. KIRWAN, VICE-CHAIR OF MARYLAND'S ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION BOARD, ROCKVILLE, MD

Dr. KIRWAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Cassidy, and Committee Members. I'm grateful for the opportunity to discuss the recently enacted Pre-K-12 education reform legislation in Maryland entitled, The Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

The Blueprint is a multi-year comprehensive plan that addresses all aspects of children's education from birth to high school completion, including most especially the recruitment, retention, and compensation of high-quality teachers.

To understand the magnitude and rationale of the changes called for in the blueprint, I need to take you back to the fall of 2016, when the Governor and General Assembly asked me to chair a 27-member commission, the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education. The charge to the commission was bold, make recommendations so that Maryland's Pre-K-12 system will perform as well as the top performing school systems in the world.

The commission spent 3 years examining in great depth the elements of several of the world's highest performing school systems, including Finland, Shanghai, China, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada. These systems all scored at or near the top on international student assessments, and almost all of their students completed a rigorous course of high school study.

During the commission's work, we discovered a remarkable thing. Even though the high performing systems we studied were on three different continents and operated in various economic, political, and cultural context, they all adhered to five basic principles that led to their success.

First, invest in early childhood development and education. Second, prepare, compensate, and treat teachers like true professionals. Third, develop a fully aligned, periodically updated, and rigorous K-12 instructional system. Fourth, invest significantly in students needing the most support to be successful, and fifth, require a high degree of accountability at the school level.

These principles became the five pillars of the commission's recommendations. Our recommendations were sent to the General Assembly and incorporated into the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation and enacted in 2021.

In my written testimony, I briefly described the elements of the five pillars on how they were built through the extensive research we did on high performing systems internationally. Given the focus of this hearing, I'll restrict my oral comments to the Blueprints Pillar 2; high quality teacher recruitment and retention. The commission observed that in every country it studied with high performing school systems, teaching is a well-regarded and well compensated profession that attracts talent similar to other high-status professions in these countries.

Their teacher preparation programs are rigorous, and certification standards are high. Moreover, teachers are treated as true professionals. They're given a significant degree of classroom au-

tonomy and actively engage in research on upgrading curricula and improving pedagogy.

Pillar 2 of the Blueprint is built on the strategies embraced by these high performing systems. Maryland's teacher preparation programs are in the process of upgrading the rigor of their curriculum, and the State Department of Education is raising certification standards.

The Blueprints principle for teacher compensation is that as professionals, teachers should be compensated at the same level as other professionals requiring similar levels of education, such as architects and CPAs.

Based on a comparison of starting salaries in these similar professions, as the Chairman said, the Blueprint sets the starting salary for all teachers at \$60,000 no later than July 1st, 2026. We are delighted to see that the Pay Teachers Act independently reached the same conclusion on compensation levels for teachers.

However, the Blueprint goes much further in addressing compensation and the work environment for teachers. To ensure high quality teachers are incentivized to stay in the classroom, the blueprint includes a career ladder for teachers modeled on what we learned from the high performing systems. The career ladder has multiple rungs of advancement and compensation based on a teacher's classroom success with students. To be and stay on the career ladder, a teacher must be board certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

There is ample research-based evidence that board certification improves a teacher's classroom effectiveness. The Blueprint provides an annual \$10,000 bonus for board certification. Teachers can also earn an additional \$7,000 annually for teaching in schools serving communities with a high concentration of poverty. With the Blueprint, successful teachers could earn six figure salaries after a half dozen years in the profession.

A U.S. Department of National Survey showed that Maryland led the Nation in the increase of students entering teacher preparation programs, an encouraging sign that the Blueprint strategies for treating teachers as true professionals are already having an impact.

Mr. Chairman, if you'll permit me, I'll conclude with this thought. As you have noted, one of our Nation's most significant challenges today is the declining quality of Pre-K-12 education. Student absenteeism is at an all-time high, and teacher shortages are at crisis levels in most states.

Our nation's students do not perform well on international assessments. Alarm bells should be ringing across the country. Our nation simply can't sustain its global leadership in the decades to come if our children don't have access to an education at the level presently offered in other advanced countries.

The Blueprint's goal is to ensure that Maryland's children receive as good an education as students anywhere else in the world, and the state has made a remarkable commitment to achieve that end. We hope the Blueprint will become a model for other states to emu-

late. Our nation's children need and deserve no less. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Kirwan follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM E. KIRWAN

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and Committee Members, I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the recently enacted Pre-K–12 education reform legislation in Maryland, entitled *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. The Blueprint is a multi-year, comprehensive plan that addresses all aspects of a child's education from birth to high school completion, including most especially the recruitment, retention, and compensation of high-quality teachers.

To understand the magnitude and rationale of the changes called for in the Blueprint, I need to take you back to the fall of 2016 when the Governor and General Assembly asked me to chair a 27-member commission, the *Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education*. The Commission included members of the General Assembly, the business community, collective bargaining entities, state and local Pre-K–12 school officials, the State Superintendent, and higher education representatives.

The charge to the commission was bold: Make recommendations so that Maryland's Pre-K–12 system will perform as well as the top-performing school systems in the world. Supported by staff from the National Center for Education and Economy, the Commission spent 3 years examining in great depth the elements of several of the world's highest-performing school systems, including Finland, Shanghai, China, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada. These systems all scored at or near the top on international student assessments, and almost all of their students completed a rigorous course of high school study.

During the Commission's work, we discovered a remarkable thing. Even though these high-performing systems were on three different continents and operated in various economic, political, and cultural contexts, they all adhered to five basic principles that led to their success: invest in early childhood development and education; prepare, compensate, and treat teachers like other professionals; develop a fully aligned, rigorous Pre-K–12 instructional system; invest heavily in students needing the most support to be successful; and require a high degree of accountability at the school level. These principles became the five pillars of the Commission's recommendations. Our recommendations were sent to the General Assembly and incorporated into the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation, codified in 2021.

I'll briefly describe the five pillars of the Blueprint but spend a little more time on the pillar involved with preparing and developing a high-quality teaching corps since this is the focus of today's hearing.

Pillar One is a significant new state investment in early childhood development and education. This investment is based on what we learned about the high-performing systems we studied. For example:

- All countries benchmarked as top performers offer free or very low-cost, high-quality early childhood education for three-to 5-year-olds (compulsory schooling typically begins at age six in these countries).
- Finland, for example, ensures that at least one-third of the childcare workers and the lead teacher in every preschool program have a bachelor's degree.
- In Ontario, all teachers of four-and 5-year-olds must have full certification as regular teachers. Full-day kindergarten is free for all four-and 5-year-olds in Ontario, and almost all 5-year-olds are enrolled.

Based on this analysis, the Blueprint expands existing centers and creates new centers across the state to support low-income families with young children on issues such as parenting, nutrition, and early child development. It also calls for high-quality full-day preschool, free for all three—and 4-year-old children from low-income families.

Following the lead of the benchmarked countries, the Blueprint requires preschool lead teachers to hold a bachelor's degree and an early childhood certification. They are compensated at levels comparable to K–12 teachers. Pre-school teaching assistants must have at least a Child Development Associate certification.

Because of the initiatives in Pillar One, we have already seen indications of an increase in the number of children coming to kindergarten ready to learn.

Pillar two concerns high-quality teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention. I'll return to it in a minute.

The *third pillar* concerns the Pre-K–12 instructional system. Based on what the Commission learned from high-performing systems, the Blueprint requires periodic reviews to ensure that the state's standards and curriculum are comparable in rigor and standards to other high-performing systems and are aligned and properly sequenced. The use of high-quality instructional materials by teachers trained in their use is a critical component of this pillar. It also includes intervention strategies to keep struggling learners on grade level. This pillar aims to build an instructional system that allows most kids to meet the college and career-ready (CCR) standard by the end of the 10th grade and no later than high school graduation. Incidentally, the Blueprint defines college and career readiness as getting students to the level to take credit-bearing entry-level college courses without remediation. Once students are CCR, they can follow one of three pathways: an advanced placement international baccalaureate curriculum, early college/dual enrollment with the possibility of earning an associate's degree for free in high school, or a rigorous career and technical education pathway, with apprenticeships, to achieve an industry-certified credential. This later pathway is modeled on the highly successful and rigorous technical education pathways in the high-performing systems studied by the Commission.

The *fourth pillar* involves investments in students who traditionally have struggled to be successful, including students from low-income families, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. A significant component of this pillar is the creation of *community schools*, which serve districts where 55 percent or more of students come from low-income families. Community schools are allocated extra resources for tutors, after-school and summer academic programming, counseling, and social services.

Addressing childhood poverty is a fundamental element of the Blueprint. One of the Commission's "aha" moments was the recognition that while nations with top-performing systems may spend less on education per student than systems in the U.S., these countries have comprehensive social safety nets and do not allow their children to grow up in poverty. Some in the U.S. would argue that the social safety net provided by community schools for students and their families is beyond the role of public schools. The Commission concluded, however, that it must make this investment for every student, no matter their zip code, to receive a high-quality education. After all, if a student cannot see the chalkboard because of a lack of glasses or their stomachs are rumbling because they haven't had breakfast, we cannot expect them to learn.

The *fifth pillar* concerns accountability. Given the massive changes called for in the Blueprint, which involves state agencies outside of the state Department of Education, the legislation created a new oversight entity called the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB). This Board comprises seven individuals appointed by the Governor from names provided by an independent nominating body. The AIB has plenary powers to approve local Blueprint implementation plans, to send in expert teams to address the underperformance of individual schools, to require personnel changes in low-performing schools, and even withhold funds from districts not meeting the Blueprint's goals and expectations.

I'll now return to *Pillar Two*, which is high-quality teacher recruitment and retention. The Commission observed that in every country it studied with high-performing school systems, teaching is a well-regarded and well-compensated profession that attracts talent similar to other high-status professions in these countries. Their teacher preparation programs are rigorous, and certification standards are high. Moreover, teachers are treated as true professionals. They are given a significant degree of classroom autonomy and are actively engaged in research on upgrading curricula and improving pedagogy.

Teaching is such a desired profession in top-performing countries that teacher preparation programs must recruit prospective teachers from the upper academic ranks of the college-bound graduating cohort: the top 50 percent in Shanghai, 33 percent in Singapore, 30 percent in Ontario, and 25 percent in Finland. Admission to teacher preparation programs in these countries is highly competitive. For example, admission to teacher preparation programs in Finland is more competitive than law school. The proportion of acceptances to applicants for places in university teacher education programs in top-performing jurisdictions ranges from one acceptance for every ten applicants to a little more than one acceptance for every four applicants. In addition to presenting a strong academic record, top-performing systems require that successful candidates complete demanding interviews and assessment

processes involving their passion for teaching, ability to relate to children, and ability to collaborate with colleagues. Starting pay for teachers in these countries is comparable to other high-status professions.

The Commission learned that in Shanghai and Singapore, the world's leaders in teacher development, teachers progress up a well-defined sequence of steps. As they progress, they acquire more responsibility, authority, status, and compensation, much as one would in a large law firm in the United States progress from associate to junior partner, to senior partner, to managing partner. Ontario, Shanghai, and Singapore have well-developed systems to induct new teachers into the profession. They are tightly structured and monitored. Mentors are recruited and selected through an interview process. They are then trained and evaluated on their effectiveness as mentors.

Essentially, all of these strategies are embedded in pillar two of the Blueprint. Our teacher preparation programs are upgrading the rigor of their curriculum, and the State Department of Education is revising certification standards.

The Blueprint's underlying principle for teacher compensation is that, as professionals, teachers should be compensated at the same level as other professions requiring similar levels of education, such as architects and CPAs. Based on a comparison of starting salaries in these similar professions, the Blueprint sets the starting wages for all new teachers at \$60,000 no later than July 1, 2026. Many of the large school districts in Maryland are already close to this goal, and starting salaries will likely exceed \$60,000 as they compete with each other and neighboring states to attract high-quality teachers.

However, the Blueprint goes much further in addressing compensation and the work environment for teachers.

To ensure high-quality teachers are incentivized to stay in the classroom, the Blueprint includes a career ladder for teachers modeled on what we learned from the high-performing systems. The career ladder has multiple rungs of advancement and compensation based on a teacher's classroom success with students. To be and stay on the career ladder, a teacher must be board-certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. There is ample research-based evidence that Board certification improves a teacher's classroom effectiveness. The Blueprint provides an annual \$10,000 bonus for board certification. Teachers can also earn an additional \$7,000 annually for teaching in schools serving communities with a high concentration of poverty. With the Blueprint, successful teachers could earn six-figure salaries after a half dozen years in the profession.

As teachers move up the career ladder, the Blueprint requires them to assume greater responsibility for mentoring new teachers, supporting professional learning communities among teachers, and engaging in research on curriculum development and new teaching and learning strategies. In sum, they will collaborate with other teachers to advance the success of their schools, not spend the entire day working alone, isolated in a single classroom. ***A recent national survey showed that Maryland led the Nation in the increase of students entering teacher preparation programs***, an encouraging sign that the Blueprint strategies for treating teachers as true professionals are already having an impact.

One of our Nation's most significant challenges today is the declining quality of Pre-K–12 education. Student absenteeism is at an all-time high, and teacher shortages are at crisis levels in most states. Our Nation's students do not perform well in international assessments. Alarm bells should be ringing across the country. Our Nation can't sustain its global leadership in the decades to come if our children don't have access to an education at the level presently offered in other advanced economies. The Blueprint's goal is to ensure that Maryland's children receive as good an education as students anywhere else in the world, and the state has made a remarkable commitment to achieve that end. We hope the Blueprint will become a model for other states to emulate. Our nation's children need and deserve no less.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF WILLIAM E. KIRWAN]

Dr. Kirwan's testimony focuses on the recently enacted Pre-K–12 education reform legislation in Maryland, entitled *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. The Blueprint is a multi-year, comprehensive plan that addresses all aspects of a child's education from birth to high school completion, including most especially the recruitment, retention, and compensation of high-quality teachers.

Key points will include:

- The role of the *Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education*—made up of members of the General Assembly, the business community, collective bargaining entities, state and local Pre-K–12 school officials, the State Superintendent, and higher education representatives—to make recommendations so that Maryland’s Pre-K–12 system will perform as well as the top-performing school systems in the world.
- Lessons learned from 3 years spent examining in great depth the elements of several of the world’s highest-performing school systems, including Finland, Shanghai, China, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada.
- The five pillars of the Commission’s recommendations: invest in early childhood development and education; prepare, compensate, and treat teachers like other professionals; develop a fully aligned, rigorous Pre-K–12 instructional system; invest heavily in students needing the most support to be successful; and require a high degree of accountability at the school level.
- Based on a comparison of starting salaries in these similar professions, the Blueprint sets the starting wages for all new teachers at \$60,000 no later than July 1, 2026.
- Many of the large school districts in Maryland are already close to this goal, and starting salaries will likely exceed \$60,000 as they compete with each other and neighboring states to attract high-quality teachers.
- To ensure high-quality teachers are incentivized to stay in the classroom, the Blueprint includes a career ladder for teachers modeled on what we learned from the high-performing systems.
- A recent national survey showed that Maryland led the Nation in the increase of students entering teacher preparation programs, an encouraging sign that the Blueprint strategies for treating teachers as true professionals are already having an impact.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Dr. Kirwan.

[Applause.]

The CHAIR. Senator Cassidy, do you want to introduce your panelists?

Senator CASSIDY. Yes, please. It’s my privilege to introduce our fourth witness Mr. Robert Pondiscio. Mr. Pondiscio is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute on their education policy team. He left his career in journalism to become a fifth-grade teacher at a struggling school in the South Bronx. Now he’s a recognized and respected expert in curriculum, teaching and school choice. We’re thankful to have your perspective today, sir, please.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT PONDISCIO, SENIOR FELLOW,
AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE, MEDUSA, NY**

Mr. PONDISCIO. Thank you. Senator Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to discuss the challenges faced by America’s classroom teachers.

I’m Robert Pondiscio, a senior fellow in education policy at the American Enterprise Institute. It is truly an honor to be here. In 2002, as Senator Cassidy mentioned, I left a career in publishing and I took an 80 percent pay cut to teach fifth grade in a South Bronx public school. I did this willingly, even proudly. I wasn’t thinking about what I would make. I was thinking I’d make a difference.

When I reflect on my days in the classroom and teaching as a profession, I don’t think about paychecks, staffing, or per pupil

funding. I think about the things that get in the way of teacher success. Teachers are told they must know the “why” behind every decision we make in the classroom.

If we expect higher pay to improve student outcomes, if that is the “why”, then I fear we’ll be disappointed. Higher pay does not ease the burden we place on teachers or add hours to their day. The problem we seldom discuss is that we have made teaching too hard for mere mortals.

Teaching is the easiest job in the world to do badly. It’s the hardest job to do well. Make no mistake, America’s teachers, most of the 4 million men and women who do it full-time, strive to excel. Visit a struggling school and you’ll meet people who are trying hard but failing.

I’d like to focus on some of the factors behind those failures, the factors that lead to teacher frustration and burnout, and that higher pay will not change. Poor teacher preparation, deteriorating classroom conditions, shoddy curriculum, and the quasi-therapeutic roles teachers are now expected to play in addition to their core academic roles.

Bluntly, we are asking teachers to do too many things for them to do any of them well. The U.S. already spends significantly more per student than the OECD average, yet student achievement remains static, as Senator Cassidy pointed out, despite increased spending and staffing.

A recent Pew Research Center survey found that 84 percent of teachers feel there isn’t enough time to complete their work. 68 percent feel their jobs are overwhelming. Nearly half of new teachers leave the classroom within 5 years. No profession sends its people to work more poorly prepared than education.

That same Pew poll found that only 36 percent of teachers feel they have the resources they need, and only one third are satisfied with their training or professional development opportunities. The former head of the National Council on Teacher Quality, Kate Walsh, criticized the inadequate preparation of teachers, she likened it to a hazing ritual. And invariably, the teachers who struggle the most are in front of the students who can afford it the least.

When the teacher is unprepared, forced to learn on the job and struggling, students do not get a do over. They only fall further behind. Why do good teachers leave? Primarily, it’s not the pay. Student behavior is out of control, creating intolerable classroom conditions that drive teachers away. A 2022 National Education Association poll, showed that nearly half of all teachers planned to quit due to school climate and safety.

An EdWeek survey last year found over 70 percent of teachers reported increased disruptive behavior since 2019. A shocking 40 percent of teachers have faced physical violence from students. Louisiana’s State Superintendent of Education, Cade Brumley, recently advocated for removing habitually disruptive students from classrooms to allow teachers to teach and students to learn. That view is refreshing, but rare. Teachers often find themselves blamed for student misbehavior, told that more engaging lessons would prevent student disruption.

Another under-discussed issue is curriculum. A RAND study found that nearly all teachers in America create or select their own instructional material, spending hours each week that could be better used analyzing student work, giving feedback, building relationships with students and parents, or developing their own expertise.

Social and emotional learning has added another layer of responsibility for teachers who are now expected to act as something like therapists and social workers. Teachers may be unqualified or unsuited for these responsibilities with potential negative consequences for students.

The inconvenient fact is that we need 4 million men and women to staff America's public-school classrooms. A number that large means that by definition, they will be ordinary people, not saints, not superstars. Improving outcomes, not a little, but by a lot requires making the job doable by the teachers we have, not the teachers we wish we had.

By all means, raise teacher pay, but do not assume that it will solve teacher shortages or keep good teachers in the classroom. Poor training, deteriorating classroom conditions, shoddy curriculum and spiraling demands have made an already challenging job nearly impossible to do well and sustainably.

Good teachers deserve our thanks, our praise, and to make a decent living. More importantly, they deserve the opportunity to make a difference. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pondiscio follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT PONDISCIO

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished Members of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions: thank you for inviting me to testify today about the challenges faced by America's classroom teachers. My name is Robert Pondiscio and I'm a senior fellow in education policy at the American Enterprise Institute. In 2002, I left the magazine business to become a 5th grade public school teacher in the South Bronx. I took a pay cut of greater than 80 percent to teach in the lowest-scoring school in New York City's poorest-performing school district. I did so willingly, even proudly. I was not thinking about what I would make. I was thinking I would make a difference.

When I reflect on my time in the classroom, I don't think about my paycheck, the staffing, or the per-pupil funding at my school, which seemed quite generous. Instead, I think about the impediments that stood—and still stand—in the way of teachers being successful.

Teaching is the easiest job in the world to do poorly, but the hardest one to do well. And make no mistake, the vast majority of our *four million full-time teachers* deeply want to do it well. So let me say at the outset that no one should begrudge paying hard-working teachers more, but we should be clear-eyed about our reasons for doing so. We work in the service of children. If our hope is that improving teacher pay will improve student outcomes, then we will likely be disappointed. Higher pay does not make a hard job easier to perform. It lifts no burden off a teacher's shoulders, nor does it add hours to a teacher's day.

I'd like to focus my testimony on a few of the factors that lead to teacher frustration and burnout that higher pay, however well-intended, does not change. They include, but are not limited to, poor teacher preparation, deteriorating classroom conditions—specifically classroom disorder and disruption—shoddy curriculum, and increasingly the expectation that they will not just teach reading, math, or their subject areas effectively, but also play a quasi-therapeutic role in response to students' behavioral and mental health needs. We are asking teachers to do too many things to do any of them well at *any* salary.

A recent Pew Research Center survey *found* that 84 percent of American teachers feel there is not enough time during their regular work hours to get all of their work done; two-thirds (68 percent) feel their jobs are overwhelming.

Spend any time in a struggling school and you will soon see that common complaints miss the mark. They are not filled with incompetent, lazy, or indifferent teachers. In the main, struggling schools are filled with good people trying hard and failing. And, as often as not, they are failing not despite their training but *because* of it. Nor are they failing because schools are underfunded. The U.S. *spends* 38 percent more per students than the average of OECD member countries, and student achievement has remained static despite four decades of increased education spending.

Teachers are trying hard and failing because we have made the job literally too hard for mere mortals to do well.

Let's start with teacher training. *Nearly* half of new teachers leave the classroom within 5 years. And no wonder.

No profession sends its people to work more poorly prepared than education. A 2024 poll from the Pew Research Center *found* that only 36 percent of American teachers feel that they have "access to the resources they need to do their job." The same survey found that only one-third of American teachers feel satisfied with their training or opportunities to develop new skills.

The former head of the National Council on Teacher Quality, Kate Walsh, *said*, "We treat the first-year teaching like it is some sorority or fraternity hazing. Educators expect a new teacher to be sick to her stomach every day at the thought of how she is going to survive the day just because that's what they once did. It's appalling!"

She's right. If we trained air-traffic controllers the way we train new teachers, we'd tell them that deadly crashes are just how you learn. We'd tell surgeons there's no substitute for hands-on experience, and not to worry: Their patient mortality rate will decline over time as they got better and more confident.

As Kate Walsh implied, the idea that every teacher struggles in his or her first year is not merely accepted but celebrated. We tell war stories in the teachers' lounge about our disastrous first years in the classroom. And almost invariably the teachers who struggle the most are in front of the students who can afford it the least.

We must never forget that while a teacher is learning on the job, it's their students' only year in that grade. Students don't get a do-over when the teacher is unprepared and struggling. They only fall further behind.

A New York City teacher *described* in his memoir how 2 years of graduate school and 6 months of student teaching left him unprepared for the realities of the classroom. "I had taken courses in lesson planning, evaluation, psychology, and research," he said. "Next to nothing was said about what a first-year teacher most needs to know: how to control a classroom."

He described his ed school experience as—quote—"a mix of folk wisdom, psychobabble, wishful thinking, and out-and-out [BS]."

Why do good teachers leave the profession? Why do new teachers leave before they have time to reach classroom competence? It's not primarily the pay. Student behavior is out of control. It creates classroom conditions that are intolerable, makes it impossible to succeed, and drives people out of the classroom. Don't take my word for it: A 2022 poll from the National Education Association *showed* that almost half of all teachers report a desire or plan to quit because of school climate and safety. An EdWeek survey last year *found* that more than 70 percent of teachers report increases in disruptive behavior in the classroom since 2019. The same Pew study I mentioned earlier revealed that a shocking 40 percent of American teachers report having had students who were physically violent toward them.

Cade Brumley, Louisiana's State Superintendent of Education, *said* in a recent interview with the Independent Women's Forum, "Students who are habitually ungovernable should be removed from teachers' classrooms . . . so teachers can actually teach and students can actually learn." It was refreshing to hear a state superintendent say that out loud, and to recognize that disruptive student behavior is classroom cancer. But attitudes like Brumley's are far too rare. Nearly every teacher has had the experience of asking for help with an unruly student and being asked what they did to trigger the disruption, or being told that students wouldn't act out if their lessons were more engaging.

Another example of how we make teachers' jobs needlessly difficult doesn't get a lot of attention, but it should. It pertains to classroom content, to curriculum.

One RAND study *found* that nearly every teacher in America—99 percent of elementary teachers, 96 percent of secondary school teachers—draws upon "materials [they] developed and/or selected [themselves]" in teaching English language arts.

The numbers are virtually the same for math. Nearly half of teachers in the study reported spending more than 4 hours per week creating or searching for instructional materials. New teachers spend the most, and at the time they should be developing and mastering their craft.

High-quality instructional materials—curriculum—should be non-negotiable and available to every teacher. Expecting them to find or create their own is like expecting a great actor to also be a great playwright, or asking a talented chef to also be the waiter and go grocery shopping the night before. Or perhaps moonlight as a farmer.

Time spent creating lessons from scratch or searching for materials on the Internet is time *not* spent analyzing student work, giving students feedback, building subject matter expertise, cultivating strong relationships with students and their parents—all of which are higher-yielding uses of teachers' time and energy. Worse, studies have *consistently demonstrated* the teacher-created lessons tend to be below standard and lacking in rigor—another drag on student outcomes.

One more example of the increasing demands placed on teachers is the rising emphasis on “social and emotional learning,” or SEL. COVID disrupted the routines and rhythms of schooling for multiple school years. It had a discernible impact on student achievement, well-being, and mental health. This has only exacerbated the challenge faced by classroom teachers. SEL is an under-discussed change in the role of the teacher, from a pedagogue to something more closely resembling a therapist, social worker, or member of the clergy. The increased focus on SEL is a fundamental shift in teachers' responsibilities, forcing them into roles that they may embrace reluctantly (or not at all) and are unqualified or unsuited to play, with potential negative consequences for students.

As damaging to children as it might be for a teacher to perform poorly at teaching reading, math, or history, the effect of being a poor mental health counselor could be even more dire.

It is hardly ever the case that teachers are knowingly doing things that are unproductive. But as Dylan Wiliam *noted* in his 2016 book *Leadership for Teacher Learning*, Dylan Wiliam, “the essence of effective leadership is stopping people from doing good things to give them time to do even better things.”

This insight deserves careful reflection among education leaders and policymakers alike. Decades of education policy have evinced unshakable faith that the way to raise student outcomes is to improve teacher quality, whether through training and certification, unlocking excellence through incentives, or by luring away the cognitive elite from better paying careers through some combination of higher pay or enhanced prestige. None of these strategies has been fruitful at scale, nor are they likely to be effective in the future.

The inconvenient fact is that the Nation needs more than 4 million people to teach our children. Any number that large means the men and women who staff our schools and teach our children will be, by definition, ordinary people—not saints, superstars or miracle workers.

In sum, there is a conceptual problem at the heart of our decades-long effort to improve student outcomes. We are seeking to raise and enhance the capacities of millions of teachers, while, at the same time, placing ever greater burdens on them. We have known for several decades that some teachers are *more effective* than others. But identifying what makes them so has proven elusive. No *consistent* or clear relationship has been found, for example, between teacher credentialing or certification exams and classroom effectiveness. If achievable, sustainable progress is our aim—and it must be our aim—we should endeavor to make the job one that can be done by the teachers we have, not the teachers we wish we had.

Once again—and emphatically—none of this is to suggest we shouldn't raise teacher pay. But there is no reason to expect that doing so will solve teacher shortages, or persuade good teachers to stay in the classroom.

Again, don't take my word for it. A 2023 RAND study *concluded* that “pay increases alone—without improvements in teachers' working hours or conditions—are unlikely to induce large shifts in teachers' well-being or intentions to leave.” The uncomfortable fact is we have made one of the most important and challenging jobs in America nearly impossible to do well.

Good teachers deserve our thanks, our praise, and to make a decent living. But more than this, they deserve to go home at the end of each day knowing they're making a difference.

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF ROBERT PONDISCIO]

Challenges Beyond Pay:

- **Poor Teacher Preparation:** New teachers often feel ill-prepared due to inadequate training. Nearly half leave the profession within 5 years.
- **Classroom Conditions:** Disruptive behavior and classroom disorder significantly contribute to teacher burnout. Surveys indicate a high prevalence of violence and disruption in classrooms.
- **Curriculum Issues:** Teachers spend excessive time creating or sourcing their own materials due to the lack of high-quality, standardized instructional resources.
- **Role Expansion:** The rising focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) forces teachers into quasi-therapeutic roles, adding to their burdens without necessarily improving academic outcomes.

Impact of Current Policies:

- Increasing education spending has not correlated with improved student achievement, suggesting inefficiencies in how resources are utilized.
- Structural issues in education policy have created unrealistic expectations for teachers, placing undue pressure on them to perform miracles with insufficient support.

Recommendations:

- **Rethink Teacher Training:** Improve teacher preparation programs to better equip new teachers for classroom realities.
- **Address Classroom Conditions:** Implement measures to manage and reduce disruptive behavior, ensuring a conducive learning environment.
- **Provide Quality Curriculum:** Ensure that teachers have access to high-quality, ready-to-use instructional materials, allowing them to focus on teaching rather than content creation.
- **Refocus Teacher Roles:** Clarify and streamline teachers' responsibilities, prioritizing core educational functions over supplementary roles like mental health counseling.

Conclusion: Pondiscio stresses that higher pay does not address the factors that make teaching overly burdensome and drive teachers out of the profession. Teachers need better preparation, support, and clear roles to truly make a difference in students' lives.

Senator CASSIDY. I would like to now introduce our fifth witness, Ms. Nicole Neily. Ms. Neily is the president and founder of Parents Defending Education a national grassroots nonprofit empowering parents to advocate for classrooms that educate. She's a leader in the Parents' Rights Movement and founded Speech First, a national campus Free speech organization.

I chuckled when I read that you're also the mother of two school age children. I told folks my hair turned gray when my daughters became two teenagers. So, you look better than I do. We're also grateful to have you here with us today to share what parents are concerned about when it comes to their children's education.

Ms. Neily.

**STATEMENT OF NICOLE NEILY, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER,
PARENTS DEFENDING EDUCATION, ARLINGTON, VA**

Ms. NEILY. Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me today.

We are grateful that the Committee has finally turned its attention to Education. America faces a lost generation of students who were negatively impacted by decisions made during the pandemic.

NAEP scores have shown the proficiency levels and core subjects fell precipitously due to school closures. So, today's hearing is a bit of a mystery because the issues the parents care about are not the ones that are being discussed today.

Families worry about the quality of their children's education. 2023 NAEP scores dropped across the country at all grade levels. In Vermont, eighth grade math deficiency dropped 11 points down to 27 percent. In Pennsylvania, it dropped 12 points to 27 percent and in Oklahoma, it dropped 10 points. Only 16 percent of children are proficient in math.

But that's not all, in students in America, they cannot read. In Virginia, only 32 percent of fourth graders are proficient in reading. In Minnesota, only 30 percent of eighth graders are, and in New Mexico, only 18 percent of eighth graders are. Yet, districts are eliminating advanced classes in the name of equity, claiming that gifted and talented programs are racist if enrollment doesn't mirror community demographics.

In schools where AP classes have been eliminated, parents have watched their children regress to the level of their least able classmate. Brilliant students are discouraged from getting too far ahead because inequity perpetuates systemic racism.

Hard work, objectivity and self-reliance are traits that made the American economy the envy of the world. Yet now those characteristics are derided as white supremacy. Kids are in school for approximately 7 hours each day, but instead of using that time to address learning loss, it's spent on identity politics.

In Lawrence, Kansas, Elementary School students march to celebrate Black Lives Matter at school week, at a school where only 32 percent of children are proficient in math. In Appleton, Wisconsin, teachers were given resources recommending that students do privilege walks, in a district where only 38 percent of middle schoolers are proficient in reading and math.

America's education system is failing the very students it was designed to serve. Trust between parents and districts has shattered. For decades, public schools have operated in loco parentis and administrators worked with families in the best interest of students. Pandemic era closures fractured this bond.

It's hard to say that districts prioritize learning when groups like the Chicago's Teachers Union asserted that the push to reopen schools was rooted in racism, sexism, and misogyny. And the head of the LA Teachers Union said, "There is no such thing as learning loss, our kids didn't lose anything. It's Okay that our babies may not have learned their timetables, they learned resilience, they know the words insurrection and coup".

But there has been a shift away from partnering with families to working against families. Consider parental exclusion policies, which explicitly state the parents don't have the right to know their child's gender identity at school.

PDE has identified nearly 1100 districts around the country with these policies impacting over 11.4 million children. Although framed as a safety issue, school officials are already mandatory re-

porters. If an employee thinks at a school that the student is in danger, they're legally obligated to file a report.

America spends billions of dollars on mental health. Perhaps teachers shouldn't tell children that Mommy and daddy won't love them if they change genders, and that the solution is to lead a double life.

Another area of concern is school safety. CDC data shows a rise in drug overdose deaths among adolescents between 2019 and 2021. While another report suggest that 20 to 30 non-fatal overdoses occur for every death.

In Massachusetts, one student's kill list was swept under the rug by the superintendent who called for empathy for the creator of the list, while creating an LGBTQIA plus affinity group and anti-bias training for the district.

Frequently parents find out about school-based incidents via social media or local news, not from the schools themselves. And following October 7th, Jew hatred has swept across K-12 schools just like on college campuses. Yet lesson plans about blood libel and swastika are largely ignored. This unequal adjudication of civil rights law threatens to undermine not only faith in our education system, but the rule of law writ large.

Schools don't have a resource issue—they have an allocation issue. There's a saying, don't tell me where your priorities are, show me where you spend your money, and I'll tell you what they are. Education leaders routinely choose to spend money on programs and personnel that don't directly benefit students. Like Glassbrook Elementary in California, where only 15 percent of students are proficient in math, which spent \$250,000 on woke kindergarten.

Federal data shows that between 2000-2019, the student population grew 7.9 percent and the teacher population grew 8.7 percent, yet administrators grew 87.6 percent. Why? DEI.

The Heritage Foundation documented the growth of Chief Diversity Officer positions in K-12 districts. Finding that standardized test results show that achievement gaps are growing wider over time in districts with CDOs. Maybe it's not a lack of money that's the problem, but instead how the money is being spent.

We want our children to stay in classrooms to learn how to read and write, not March for climate change. We want our children to know how to get the right answer in math class, not be told that showing their work is white supremacy. We want our children to be safe when we drop them off, and we don't want teachers to tell them to keep secrets from mom and dad. Fixing the American education system is hard, which is why it is essential to identify and grapple with the real problems and not pre-election sloganeering. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Neily follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NICOLE NEILY



Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Cassidy, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions: thank you for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Nicole Neily, and I am the president and founder of Parents Defending Education – a membership association that gives parents the knowledge and tools they need to be effective advocates for their children’s education. I’m also the executive director of PDE Action, a 501(c)4 advocacy organization.

We are deeply grateful that the Committee has finally turned its attention to education. As news outlets,¹² nonprofits,³ and government agencies⁴ have noted, America is facing a “lost generation” of children whose schooling was negatively impacted by pandemic-related school closures. As this Committee is all too aware, NAEP scores – more colloquially known as “the Nation’s Report Card” – have shown that proficiency levels in core subjects such as reading and math fell precipitously in the wake of covid-era closures. Stanford University’s Eric Hanushek has asserted⁵ that pandemic learning losses “are equivalent on average to a 6 percent income tax surcharge throughout the students’ working lives. This rises to 8 percent for the average Black student, who suffered greater learning losses according to NAEP.”

¹ Smith, Tracy. “COVID’s education crisis: A lost generation?” CBS News, March 26, 2023. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covids-education-crisis-a-lost-generation/>

² Cowen, Jim. “Don’t Let Pandemic-Related Learning Losses Result In A Lost Generation,” Forbes, September 8, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimcowen/2022/09/08/dont-let-pandemic-related-learning-losses-result-in-a-lost-generation/>

³ Pondiscio, Robert. “A new lost generation: Disengaged, aimless, and adrift,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 2, 2024. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/new-lost-generation-disengaged-aimless-and-adrift>

⁴ UNICEF USA. “UNICEF Calls for Averting a Lost Generation as COVID-19 Threatens to Cause Irreversible Harm to Children’s Education, Nutrition, and Well-Being.” November 19, 2020. <https://www.unicefusa.org/press/unicef-calls-averting-lost-generation-covid-19-threatens-cause-irreversible-harm-childrens>

⁵ Hanushek, Eric. “Generation Lost: The Pandemic’s Lifetime Tax,” Education Next, Vol. 24 No. 2, Spring 2024. <https://www.educationnext.org/generation-lost-the-pandemics-lifetime-tax/>

These are figures that should shock the conscience. Many members of this Committee have spoken publicly about “equity,” which is why this learning loss disproportionately impacting disadvantaged students should raise alarm bells.

These figures are also why the title of today’s hearing is a bit of a mystery – because the issues that the vast majority of American parents care about are not the three that were chosen by the Chairman.

Families worry about the quality of the education their children are receiving.

As mentioned earlier, NAEP scores released in 2023 showed significant drops across the country at all grade levels.

- In **Vermont**, only 27 percent of 8th graders are proficient in math, which means 73 percent are not (a drop of 11 percent from 2019);⁶
- In **Pennsylvania**, only 27 percent of 8th graders are proficient in math so again, that means 73 percent are not (a 12 percent drop from 2019);⁷
- In **Washington**, only 28 percent of 8th graders are proficient in math, which means 72 percent are not (a 12 percent drop from 2019);⁸

This is not a partisan issue, however – as the impact is felt in red states as well as blue states.

- In **North Carolina**, only 25 percent of 8th graders are proficient in math while 75 percent are not (down 12 percent from 2019);⁹
- In **Oklahoma**, only 16 percent of 8th graders are proficient in math while 84 percent are not (down 10 percent from 2019).¹⁰

⁶ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 MATHEMATICS STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT VERMONT - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011VT8.pdf>

⁷ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 MATHEMATICS STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT PENNSYLVANIA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011PA8.pdf>

⁸ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 MATHEMATICS STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT WASHINGTON - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011WA8.pdf>

⁹ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 MATHEMATICS STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT NORTH CAROLINA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011NC8.pdf>

¹⁰ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 MATHEMATICS STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT OKLAHOMA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011OK8.pdf>

These statistics are an accountability measure, and the numbers don't lie. Perhaps this is one reason why activists now demand¹¹ the abolition¹² of tests: because these test scores reveal that the American education system is failing – even when evaluated through the pedagogical rubric *du jour*, “equitable grading.”

Bumper stickers about “equity” may sound great, but when people learn what equitable grading is, its popularity falls among families and teachers alike. Whereas traditional grading is based on knowledge and accuracy, incorporating behavioral elements such as class participation and turning in work on time - grading for equity seeks to address “inequities” and “bias” in education by prioritizing “motivation” and “feedback” over subject mastery, behavior, and measurable outcomes.

In practice, look across the river to Fairfax County Virginia: the equitable grading policy¹³ for the country's eleventh-largest school district states that all grades will be on a 100-point scale, with 50% as the minimum grade for submitted assignments; that being said, teachers must accept major assignments up to two weeks late, and the maximum deduction for that two-week period is 10 percent.

How exactly does teaching children “deadlines don't matter” set them up for future success in life? It's unlikely that any member of this committee would hire or promote staff who fail to turn in research or bill text on a timely basis – nor should they. We do not send our children – or our tax dollars – to schools to artificially inflate students' egos. We send them to school to LEARN.

Sadly, however, very little learning seems to be taking place. To underscore a terrifying reality in 2024: students in America CANNOT READ.

- In **Virginia**, only 32 percent of 4th graders are proficient in reading, so 68 percent are not;¹⁴
- In **Minnesota**, only 30 percent of 8th graders are proficient in reading so 70 percent are not;¹⁵

¹¹ Soares, Jason A. “Dismantling White Supremacy Includes Ending Racist Tests like the SAT and ACT,” Teachers College Press, June 22, 2020. <https://www.tcpress.com/blog/dismantling-white-supremacy-includes-racist-tests-sat-act/>

¹² Long, Cindy. “Standardized Testing is Still Failing Students,” NEA Today, March 30, 2023. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/standardized-testing-still-failing-students>

¹³ Fairfax County Public Schools Office of Communications, “FCPS This Week - August 23, 2023” <https://www.fcps.edu/news/fcps-week-august-23-2023>

¹⁴ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, “2022 READING STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT VIRGINIA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010VA8.pdf>

¹⁵ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card, “2022 READING STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT MINNESOTA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010MN8.pdf>

- In **Alaska**, only 24 percent of 4th graders are proficient in reading so 76 percent are not;¹⁶
- In **New Mexico**, only 18 percent of 8th graders are proficient in reading so 82 percent are not.¹⁷

To some states, however, a lack of basic skills poses no impediment to a diploma; last fall, the Oregon Board of Education voted unanimously¹⁸ to pause graduation requirements until 2029 – which, prior to the pandemic, included a test to demonstrate basic mastery of reading, writing and math. The official explanation for this reform cited its impact on “historically marginalized” students – which means that a state government explicitly told teenagers that given their backgrounds, they might not pass a test... but don’t worry, they’ll get a participation trophy diploma anyway! Sadly, the people who will be the most hurt by this condescending, racist attitude are the students who graduate without basic skills – and who have internalized the lesson that the color of their skin determines their worth.

Today, far too many schools treat students as cogs in a one-size-fits all machine, rather than as individuals. From coast to coast, districts are eliminating advanced classes in the name of “equity” – claiming that gifted and talented programs are “racist”¹⁹ if participation in these programs fails to mirror community demographics²⁰ and that maintaining gifted programs perpetuates harm²¹ upon students by negatively impacting self-esteem. To address these perceived injustices, schools have chosen to build cumbersome DEI bureaucracies, rather than using those dollars to fund tutoring and intervention programs to students at younger ages when critical foundational skills must be mastered.

In districts where tracking or advanced classes have been eliminated, parents have watched their children regress to the lowest common denominator, because educators must teach to the level of the least able student in class. Brilliant students who have the potential to strive for greatness are disincentivized from working hard or getting too far ahead, because inequity

¹⁶ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 READING STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT ALASKA - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010AK8.pdf>

¹⁷ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation’s Report Card, “2022 READING STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT NEW MEXICO - GRADE 8 - PUBLIC SCHOOLS”

<https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023010NM8.pdf>

¹⁸ Edge, Sami. “Oregon again says students don’t need to prove mastery of reading, writing or math to graduate, citing harm to students of color,” The Oregonian, October 22, 2023.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2023/10/oregon-again-says-students-dont-need-to-prove-mastery-of-reading-writing-or-math-to-graduate-citing-harm-to-students-of-color.html>

¹⁹ McMillan, Tracie. “Gifted and Talented Programs Benefit White Students Disproportionately,” Teen Vogue, April 24, 2024. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/gifted-and-talented-programs-white-bonus>

²⁰ McKinney, Roger. “Lawsuit against Columbia schools alleges racial discrimination in gifted program placement,” Columbia Daily Tribune, March 10, 2021.

<https://www.columbiatribune.com/story/news/education/2021/03/10/lawsuit-alleges-discrimination-columbia-missouri-schools-gifted-program/6924896002/>

²¹ Miller, Viona J. “Access Denied: Tracking as a Modern Roadblock to Equal Educational Opportunity,” New York University Law Review, Vol. 93 No. 4, October 2018. <https://www.nyulawreview.org/issues/volume-93-number-4/access-denied-tracking-as-a-modern-roadblock-to-equal-educational-opportunity/>

perpetuates “systemic racism.” Rather than inspire all students to excellence, administrators now imply that exceptional ability is somehow shameful. Hard work, objectivity, and self-reliance are traits that made the American economy the envy of the world – yet today, those characteristics are regularly derided²² as tools of “white supremacy.”

Children are in school for approximately seven hours each day – yet rather than spending finite classroom time making up learning loss, classes now spend hours each day on extraneous programming related to identity politics.

- In **Lawrence, Kansas**: Cordley Elementary School students marched to celebrate Black Lives Matter at School week²³ – a school where only 32 percent of students are proficient in math and 52 percent are proficient in reading.²⁴
- In **Appleton, Wisconsin**: the Appleton Area School District provides educators with resources that recommend having students do “privilege walks”²⁵ – in a district where only 38 percent of middle schoolers are proficient in reading and math.²⁶
- In **Boston, Massachusetts**: Boston Public Schools’ ethnic studies curriculum focuses on oppression and “Pillars of White Supremacy”²⁷ – in a district where only 27 percent of high schoolers are proficient in math and 34 percent are proficient in reading.²⁸

Virtue signaling on these topics may be good cocktail party conversation in state capitols, but the fact remains that America’s education system is failing the very students that it was designed to serve. Parents know this, and no amount of jargon about diversity, equity, and inclusion will gaslight families into believing that their children are receiving the kind of education that they deserve.

Trust between parents and districts has been shattered since the pandemic.

²² Watts, Marina. “In Smithsonian Race Guidelines, Rational Thinking and Hard Work Are White Values,” Newsweek, July 17, 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/smithsonian-race-guidelines-rational-thinking-hard-work-are-white-values-1518333>

²³ Parents Defending Education, “Lawrence Public Schools shares image on Facebook of elementary students marching for Black Lives Matter movement,” February 17, 2023. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/lawrence-public-schools-shares-image-on-facebook-of-elementary-students-marching-for-black-lives-matter-movement/>

²⁴ U.S. News & World Report, “Cordley Elementary,” accessed June 17, 2024. <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/kansas/cordley-elementary-241067>

²⁵ Parents Defending Education, “Appleton Area School District provides teachers with resources that recommend having students do ‘privilege walks’; promises to ‘incorporate SEL into every classroom,’” December 9, 2021. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/appleton-area-school-district-provides-teacher-with-resources-that-recommend-having-students-do-privilege-walks-promises-to-incorporate-sel-into-every-classroom/>

²⁶ U.S. News & World Report, “Appleton Area School District,” accessed June 17, 2024. <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/districts/appleton-area-school-district-103402>

²⁷ Parents Defending Education, “Boston Public Schools’ ethnic studies curriculum focuses on oppression and ‘Pillars of White Supremacy,’” May 31, 2022. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/boston-public-schools-ethnic-studies-curriculum-focuses-on-oppression-and-pillars-of-white-supremacy/>

²⁸ U.S. News & World Report, “Boston Public Schools,” accessed June 17, 2024. <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/massachusetts/districts/boston-111992>

For decades, public schools have operated *in loco parentis* – in the place of a parent – and administrators worked together in the best interest of students.

Without a doubt, pandemic-era school closures created significant fissures in this relationship, with parents questioning whether schools truly prioritized learning when entities like the Chicago Teachers Union asserted that “the push to reopen schools is rooted in sexism, racism, and misogyny”²⁹ and people like Cecily Myart-Cruz, head of the Los Angeles teachers’ union said “There is no such thing as learning loss... Our kids didn’t lose anything. It’s OK that our babies may not have learned all their times tables. They learned resilience. They learned survival. They learned critical-thinking skills. They know the difference between a riot and a protest. They know the words *insurrection* and *coup*.”³⁰ In the wake of California’s recent \$2 billion settlement³¹ over pandemic-related learning loss, it seems Ms. Myart-Cruz was sorely mistaken – yet she remains gainfully employed as the head of a 35,000-person affiliate of the NEA and AFT.

Over the past several years, however, there has been a marked shift away from partnering with families to working against families – and this trend is, yet again, one that hurts the very people this system is designed to serve.

Nowhere is this redirection more vivid than in the rise of “parental exclusion policies,” an issue that would make the Founders roll over in their graves. These policies explicitly state that parents DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT to know their child’s gender identity at school. As of this week, my organization, Parents Defending Education, has identified 1,086 school districts around the country and counting with these policies on the books, impacting over 11.4 million children.³²

Although these have been passed by elected school boards under the guise of “safety,” activists fail to acknowledge that school officials are already mandatory reporters – so if a teacher believes that a student is in a dangerous home situation, they must file a report through official channels. As unpleasant as a Child & Protective Services investigation may be, it does feature due process protections – whereas under today’s parental exclusion policies in taxpayer-funded schools, snap judgments are made about a family’s potential “support” for a gender-questioning child based on characteristics like political affiliation or religion. In Eau Claire,

²⁹ Van Dyke, Tyler. “Chicago Teachers Union removes tweet claiming push to reopen schools ‘rooted in sexism, racism and misogyny,’” Washington Examiner, December 7, 2020. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/2614237/chicago-teachers-union-removes-tweet-claiming-push-to-reopen-schools-rooted-in-sexism-racism-and-misogyny/>

³⁰ McGahan, Jason. “Exclusive: Cecily Myart-Cruz’s Hostile Takeover of L.A.’s Public Schools,” Los Angeles Magazine, August 26, 2021. <https://lamag.com/featured/cecily-myart-cruz-teachers-union>

³¹ Watt, Nick. “California agrees to \$2 billion settlement over Covid pandemic learning loss for struggling students,” CNN.com, March 28, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/01/us/california-settlement-covid-learning-loss/index.html>

³² Parents Defending Education, “List of School District Transgender – Gender Nonconforming Student Policies,” last updated June 17, 2024. <https://defendinged.org/investigations/list-of-school-district-transgender-gender-nonconforming-student-policies/>

Wisconsin, teachers were told during a professional development session that “parents are not entitled to know their kids’ identities. That knowledge must be earned.”³³

At a time when America is spending billions of dollars on student mental health – including under the bipartisan Safer Communities Act passed by this body – why on earth would we want a math teacher telling a confused child that mommy and daddy might not love them because of their gender – and the solution is to lead a double life?

Again, this is not a partisan issue. In March 2023, PDE polled voters on this issue, and found opposition to hiding this critical information from families spanned racial and political lines.³⁴

- 71 percent of registered voters oppose letting schools withhold information about a child’s gender identity from their parents, while only 21 percent support this policy.
- This included 76 percent of Black voters, 71 percent of white voters, 66 percent of Hispanic voters, and 59 percent of Asian voters oppose this policy – and as far as party identification, 85 percent of Republican voters, 74 percent of Independent voters, and 59 percent of Democratic voters oppose this policy.

“Social transitioning” children using new names and pronouns is an active mental-health intervention³⁵ – as are schools facilitating chest binders³⁶ for girls, “tucking” underwear³⁷ for boys, and encouraging students to use the restrooms, locker rooms, and overnight field trip facilities that align with a student’s self-declared gender identity. These are significant decisions bound to be fraught with both support and opposition from students and staff alike, and it is unconscionable that adults would impose an additional emotional burden on a minor child by guessing whether or not family members will be “supportive.”

As parents fight to remain involved in their child’s education, they face headwinds that insist that parents should pound sand because they’re not “experts.” In February 2023, an Arizona

³³ Parents Defending Education, “Eau Claire Area School District states that ‘parents are not entitled’ to know about their children choosing to change gender identities,” March 4, 2022. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/eau-claire-area-school-district-states-that-parents-are-not-entitled-to-know-about-their-children-choosing-to-change-gender-identities/>

³⁴ Parents Defending Education, “Parents Defending Education poll: 71% of voters support legislation requiring schools to inform parents if their child wants to change their gender identity,” March 21, 2023. <https://defendinged.org/press-releases/parents-defending-education-poll-71-of-voters-support-legislation-requiring-schools-to-inform-parents-if-their-child-wants-to-change-their-gender-identity/>

³⁵ Foote v. Ludlow. Brief Amicus Curiae of the Manhattan Institute & Dr. Leor Sapir. March 21, 2023.

<https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/amicus-brief-foote-v-ludlow-school-committee.pdf>
³⁶ Parents Defending Education, “Transgender Center Staffers at Washington University of St. Louis and St. Louis Children’s Hospital Advise Parkway Schools Not to Tell Parents About Child Chest Binder Use,” January 12, 2023. <https://defendinged.org/incidents/transgender-center-staffers-at-washington-university-of-st-louis-and-st-louis-childrens-hospital-advise-parkway-schools-not-to-tell-parents-about-child-chest-binder-use/>

³⁷ LeMahieu, Leif. “New Jersey School District Partnered With Sex-Ed Group That Provides Kits With ‘Tucking’ Underwear, Chest Binders,” Daily Wire, November 7, 2023. <https://www.dailywire.com/news/new-jersey-school-district-partnered-with-sex-ed-group-that-provides-kits-with-tucking-underwear-chest-binders>

teacher testified³⁸ before the state legislature: “I have a master’s degree because when I got certified, I was told I had to have a master’s degree to be an Arizona certified teacher. We all have advanced degrees. What do the parents have? Are we vetting the backgrounds of our parents? Are we allowing the parents to choose the curriculum and the books that our children are going to read? I think that is a mistake.” And famously in 2021, former Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe said “I’m not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decisions ... I don’t think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.”³⁹

Far too many districts around the country now make it difficult⁴⁰ – if not impossible⁴¹ – for parents to opt their children out of lesson plans or curriculum that do not comport with their family values. When a school district tells you that they have no interest in addressing your concerns, the relationship is certainly not built on mutual respect – it is an abuse of power.

Another significant area where parents have been cut out of the loop is that of school safety. CDC data shows⁴² a rise in drug overdose deaths among adolescents (14–18 years old) between 2019-2021, while another CDC report⁴³ suggests that between 20-30 nonfatal overdoses occur for every overdose death. Frighteningly, however, parents often find out about school-based incidents through social media or local news – not the schools themselves – because of privacy issues surrounding the transmission of such information. In Virginia, Governor Glenn Youngkin stepped in to affirmatively assert⁴⁴ parents have a right to know this information, so that families know to discuss this topic with their loved ones.

With regards to violence, schools lack basic transparency measures. While universities are obligated to follow the Clery Act, K-12 schools have no such requirements in place – again,

³⁸ ADI Staff Reporter, “Arizona Special Education Teacher Questions What Qualifies A Parent To Parent,” Arizona Daily Independent, February 19, 2023. <https://arizonadailyindependent.com/2023/02/arizona-special-education-teacher-questions-what-qualifies-a-parent-to-parent/>

³⁹ The Editors, “Terry McAuliffe’s War on Parents,” National Review, October 1, 2021. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/10/terry-mcauliffes-war-on-parents/>

⁴⁰ Bowman, Rachel. “Minnesota school district allows parents to opt children out of LGBTQ lessons after six Somali Muslim families threatened legal action over religious freedom,” Daily Mail, February 19, 2024. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13100413/Minnesota-schools-St-Louis-Park-LGBTQ-book-opt-parents.html>

⁴¹ Bash, Homa. “Minnesota school district allows parents to opt children out of LGBTQ lessons after six Somali Muslim families threatened legal action over religious freedom,” Fox5DC, May 15, 2024. <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/maryland-parents-must-accept-lgbtq-inclusive-curriculum-appeals-court-decides>

⁴² Center for Disease Control Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, “Drug Overdose Deaths Among Persons Aged 10–19 Years — United States, July 2019–December 2021,” December 16, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7150a2.htm>

⁴³ Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, “Fentanyl and Opioids: Preventing Overdoses and Related Emergencies at K-12 and Higher Education Campuses,” accessed June 17, 2024. https://rems.ed.gov/docs/OpioidsFactSheet_508c.pdf

⁴⁴ Cline, Nathaniel. “Youngkin issues order aimed at requiring schools to notify parents of drug overdoses,” November 2, 2023. <https://virginiamercury.com/2023/11/02/youngkin-issues-order-aimed-at-requiring-schools-to-notify-parents-of-drug-overdoses/>

forcing families to turn to social media or to quiz their child about incidents at schools so they are aware of threats in real time. In Massachusetts, one student's "kill list" was swept under the rug by an administrator, who called for "empathy for the creator" of the list, choosing instead to create an LGBTQIA+ affinity group and anti-bias training for the district.⁴⁵ In the wake of October 7th, a wave of Jew-hatred has swept K-12 schools, mirroring the antisemitism manifesting on college campuses – yet for some reason, lesson plans about settler-colonialism and blood libel and jokes about Hitler go largely ignored. This unequal adjudication of civil rights law threatens to undermine not only faith in our education system, but in the rule of law writ large.

Since the dawn of time, the role of families has been to protect the next generation, guiding and supporting children on their journey to adulthood. It is truly a slap in the face to have taxpayer-funded schools acting as though their sacred duty is to protect children from their families.

Schools don't have a resource issue – they have an allocation issue.

I assume this Committee is aware that the U.S. Census recently released its Annual Survey of School System Finances data, which found⁴⁶ that average per pupil spending in elementary and secondary schools rose 8.9% in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to \$15,633 – due in part to the federal government's \$189.5 billion covid-related largesse.⁴⁷ This is an average, of course; according to their own calculations, districts like New York City Public Schools spend \$30,738 per pupil,⁴⁸ whereas the Alpine District in Utah spends \$11,871 per pupil.⁴⁹ I hope we can all acknowledge that differences in cost of living vary widely between these regions.

On the big picture topic of whether schools are sufficiently funded or not, I urge you to review the work of Dr. Marguerite Roza at Georgetown's Edunomics Lab, who has deeply analyzed school spending at the local, state, and federal level.

⁴⁵ Reinl, James. "Leaked emails show how a woke Massachusetts school handled a trans student's 'hit list' threat - anti-bias training and 'LGBTQIA+ affinity group,'" Daily Mail, April 23, 2024. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13337991/Leaked-emails-woke-Massachusetts-school-transgender-student-hit-list.html>

⁴⁶ Anesta, Kaylee. "Spending Per Pupil in Public Schools Averaged \$15,633, Up 8.9% in FY 2022," United States Census Bureau, April 25, 2024. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/04/public-school-spending.html>

⁴⁷ Pandemic Oversight, "States received \$189.5 billion in relief for schools. Here's the breakdown," February 24, 2022. <https://www.pandemicoversight.gov/data-interactive-tools/data-stories/states-received-1895-billion-relief-schools-heres-breakdown>

⁴⁸ NYC Public Schools, "Funding Our Schools," accessed June 17, 2024. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/funding/funding-our-schools>

⁴⁹ Utah State Board of Education, "Per Pupil Revenue and Expenditure – All Funds, Fiscal Year 2023." Accessed June 17, 2024. https://www.schools.utah.gov/superintendentannualreport/financialoperations/fy2023/23_PPE_allFunds.pdf

There's a famous saying: "Don't tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money and I'll tell you what they are." Viewed through this lens, many state and local leaders prioritize progressive politics and money over the welfare of students.

Consider the 2020 demands of the United Teachers Los Angeles before they would allow schools to reopen so students could attend in-person classes: privately operated publicly funded charter schools shut down across the state, defund the police, Medicare-for-All, a statewide wealth tax, and fully funded housing for the homeless.⁵⁰

UTLA wasn't a one-time shakedown, though; from coast-to-coast, education leaders routinely choose to spend money on programs and personnel that do not directly benefit students.

- Glassbrook Elementary in Hayward, California spent \$250,000⁵¹ on "Woke Kindergarten," a program promoted by districts around the country created by an activist who thinks America and Israel have "no right to exist"⁵² – for context, 15 percent of Glassbrook students are proficient in math, while 20 percent are proficient in reading;⁵³
- San Francisco Unified School District voted to rename 44 school buildings (including after luminaries like Sen. Dianne Feinstein, President Abraham Lincoln, and composer Francis Scott Key!) at a cost of \$440,000⁵⁴ – 36 percent of SFUSD high schoolers are proficient in math, while 52 percent are proficient in reading;⁵⁵
- Whitewater Unified School District in Wisconsin spent \$1.6 million of its ESSER funds on synthetic turf fields⁵⁶ – 18 percent of Whitewater USD high schoolers are proficient in math, while 29 percent are proficient in reading;⁵⁷ and

⁵⁰ Grimes, Katy. "L.A. Teachers Union: Schools Can't Reopen Unless Charter Schools Shut Down, Police Defunded," California Globe, July 13, 2020. <https://californiaglobe.com/articles/l-a-teachers-union-says-schools-cant-reopen-unless-charter-schools-shut-down-and-police-are-defunded/>

⁵¹ Hall, Alexander. "California school terminates contract with controversial 'Woke Kindergarten' program," New York Post, February 14, 2024. <https://nypost.com/2024/02/14/news/california-school-terminates-contract-with-controversial-woke-kindergarten-program/>

⁵² Farrell, Paul. "Non-binary activist Akiea Gross who founded controversial for-profit 'Woke Kindergarten' program that calls to abolish police and Israel now posts online rant saying 'US has no right to exist,'" Daily Mail, February 5, 2024. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13047455/Akiea-Gross-woke-kindergarten-non-binary-right-exist.html>

⁵³ U.S. News & World Report, "Glassbrook Elementary," accessed June 17, 2024.

<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/california/glassbrook-elementary-236201>

⁵⁴ Iovino, Nicholas. "San Francisco OKs Plan to Strip Lincoln and Washington From School Names," Courthouse News Service, January 26, 2021. <https://www.courthousenews.com/san-francisco-oks-plan-to-strip-lincoln-and-washington-from-school-names/>

⁵⁵ U.S. News & World Report, "San Francisco Unified School District," accessed June 17, 2024.

<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/california/districts/san-francisco-unified-111777>

⁵⁶ Binkley, Collin and Foley, Ryan J. "Flush with COVID-19 aid, schools steer funding to sports," Associated Press, October 6, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-school-funding-sports-5b468b260ebd2593e53f03f9104d9bca>

⁵⁷ U.S. News & World Report, "Whitewater Unified School District," accessed June 17, 2024.

<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/wisconsin/districts/whitewater-unified-school-district-112881>

- In Wisconsin, 28.2 percent – or 1 of every 4 dollars – of the state’s ESSER money was allocated toward new additions or renovations, which did not address learning loss; specifically, Milwaukee put 45.7 percent of current ESSER allocations toward construction even though Milwaukee’s Black students rank last in the nation in reading among big districts. In addition, 178 districts allotted less than 5 percent to curriculum and instructional staff. Yet 52 percent of districts have not yet replaced discredited reading curricula like Lucy Calkins Units of Study and Fountas & Pinnell Literacy.⁵⁸

According to data from the federal Education Department’s Center for Education Statistics, between 2000-2019 the student population grew 7.9 percent while the teacher population grew 8.7 percent; however, administrators grew a staggering 87.6 percent⁵⁹ – so it is imperative that any discussion of education spending (or the lack thereof) must address the explosion of administrator positions vis-à-vis principals and teachers.

Percentage Change in K-12 Staff Positions, 2000-2019

	District Administrative Staff	Principals/Asst Principals	Teachers
2000	97,270	141,792	2,941,461
2019	182,477	193,734	3,198,170
% change	87.6%	36.6%	8.7%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, “Staff employed in public elementary and secondary school systems, by type of assignment: Selected years, 1949-1950 through fall 2019”⁶⁰

I work with a number of former educators, and my coworkers and I strongly believe that good teachers deserve to be paid commensurate with their worth. It should not be controversial to assert that if it is more difficult to find a teacher with subject matter expertise – for example, an AP Physics teacher, or Calculus – that educators with specialized skills and knowledge should be more highly compensated than other areas of scholarship. Unfortunately, many union contracts prohibit or otherwise strictly govern hiring decisions – taking power out of the hands of local leaders who want to recruit the best and the brightest for their districts.

In the K-12 administrator space, one field in particular has experienced significant expansion over the past several years: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

The Heritage Foundation has documented the growth of “Chief Diversity Officer” (CDO) positions in K-12 districts, finding that “39 percent of the 554 districts with more than 15,000

⁵⁸ Institute for Reforming Government, “SUMMARY: IRG’S ESSER RELIEF AUDIT,” March 2, 2023. <https://reforminggovernment.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ESSER-Report-March-17-short.pdf>

⁵⁹ Arn, Larry. “Education as a Battleground,” Imprimis, Volume 51, Issue 11, November 2022. <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/education-as-a-battleground/>

⁶⁰ Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. “Table 213.10. Staff employed in public elementary and secondary school systems, by type of assignment: Selected years, 1949-50 through fall 2019,” accessed June 17, 2024. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_213.10.asp

students employ a CDO. Among larger districts, CDO positions were much more common, with 79 percent of districts with more than 100,000 students having a CDO or its equivalent.” It stands to reason that districts with these positions would have better outcomes than those without; yet as Dr. Jay Greene notes, “Standardized test results show that achievement gaps are growing wider over time in districts with CDOs. From 2009 to 2018, the white–black achievement gap grew by 0.03 grade levels each year in districts with CDOs relative to districts without that position. The white–Hispanic achievement gap grew by 0.02 grade levels more per year over this time period in districts with CDOs versus those without them. And the gap between poor and non-poor students grew by 0.01 grade level in districts with CDOs compared to those without them.”⁶¹

Expenditures on these staff – and these programs – are not insignificant; at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, one USA Today headline bluntly stated “Schools spend billions on training so every student can succeed. They don’t know if it works.”⁶²

Respectfully, I suggest to the committee that it is not a lack of money that is the problem in schools; rather, it’s how the money is being spent. We would prefer for our children to stay in a classroom and learn how to read and write, rather than be sent out in the snow to march in support of BLM.⁶³ We want our children to know how to get the right answer in math class, period – not be told that showing their work is “white supremacy.”⁶⁴ We want our children to be safe when we drop them at the schoolhouse gates, and for their teachers to not tell them that their parents’ love might be conditional based on gender identity.

Fixing the American education system is going to be difficult, and it will take an all-hands-on-deck approach. But to do so, it is essential that we identify and grapple with the real problems – rather than simply pre-election sloganeering.

⁶¹ Greene, Jay and Paul, James. “Equity Elementary: ‘Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion’ Staff in Public Schools,” October 19, 2021. <https://www.heritage.org/education/report/equity-elementary-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-staff-public-schools>

⁶² Reynolds Lewis, Katherine. “Schools spend billions on training so every student can succeed. They don’t know if it works,” USA Today, September 14, 2023. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2023/09/14/flawed-equity-efforts-us-schools-teachers/70679911007/>

⁶³ Leesman, Madeleine. “Maine Elementary School Encouraged Students to Participate in BLM March,” Townhall.com, May 11, 2023. <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/madeleineleesman/2023/05/11/students-blm-protest-n2623113>

⁶⁴ Jacobson, Linda. “Can Right Answers Be Wrong? Latest Clash Over ‘White Supremacy Culture’ Unfolds in Unlikely Arena: Math Class,” The 74, June 21, 2021. <https://www.the74million.org/article/can-right-answers-be-wrong-latest-clash-over-white-supremacy-culture-unfolds-in-unlikely-arena-math-class/>

[SUMMARY STATEMENT OF NICOLE NEILY]

Families worry about the quality of the education their children are receiving.

- NAEP scores released in 2023 showed significant drops across the country at all grade levels.
- The terrifying reality in 2024 is that students in America cannot read.
- Children are in school for approximately 7 hours each day—yet rather than spending finite classroom time making up learning loss, classes now spend hours each day on extraneous programming related to identity politics.
- We do not send our children—or our tax dollars—to schools to improve students' self-esteem. We send them to school to learn.

Trust between parents and districts has been shattered since the pandemic.

- Over the past several years, there has been a marked shift away from partnering with families to working against families—and this trend hurts the very people this system is designed to serve.
- Since the dawn of time, the role of families has been to protect the next generation, guiding and supporting children on their journey to adulthood. It is truly a slap in the face to have taxpayer-funded schools acting as though their sacred duty is to protect children from their families.

Schools don't have a resource issue—they have an allocation issue.

- From coast-to-coast, education leaders routinely choose to spend money on programs and personnel that do not directly benefit students.
- Between 2000–2019 the student population grew 7.9 percent while the teacher population grew 8.7 percent; however, administrators grew a staggering 87.6 percent—so it is imperative that any discussion of education spending (or the lack thereof) must address the explosion of administrator positions vis-à-vis principals and teachers.

The CHAIR. Thank you to all of the witnesses. One way or another, you all touched on issues that go beyond the classroom, what's going on in our Country.

I'd like to start off by asking Mr. Arthur and Mr. Keyes and Dr. Kirwan, what are some of the realities that teachers are experiencing in the classroom? How many of our kids are walking into school from dysfunctional families? How many kids maybe sleeping out in cars? How many kids have seen violence in their community and with the trauma that might bring about? How many kids are suffering from emotional disturbances, and are acting out in the classroom, making the teacher's job that much more difficult? Mr. Arthur, what are teachers around the country seeing in the classrooms?

Mr. ARTHUR. Chairman, the answer to your question is too many. All of your questions can be summed up by too many of our children are struggling, too many of our families are hurting. And as you mentioned and was mentioned by other speakers, we are understaffed, under resourced and under prepared to deal with this moment because no one has experienced this moment in history before.

Nobody has learned how to teach during a pandemic in our Country's history. We didn't know what we were doing, but we did it anyway and we got it done. And every teacher right now who is in the classroom, who taught through the pandemic, we're not just teachers anymore. We're survivors.

As we try to give each other grace, as we deal with these large issues and try to figure out how it is that we best come through this, I think that the strongest show of support that we could make to our classroom teachers and our students and our parents and our families is just to recognize we're doing something unprecedented.

As we do that, we're going to fumble, we're going to try, but you cannot do something remarkable if you're under-resourced. We do need more tools and more means of making this happen.

The CHAIR. Mr. Keyes, what are teachers in the classroom in Philadelphia seeing in their kids, kids coming in, well fed, et cetera.

Mr. KEYES. I'll have to agree with much of what Mr. Arthur said. Not only are they coming to school, they're coming to school from traumatic experiences, traumatic backgrounds, and a lot of the issue has to do with things that they see in their environment. And a lot of what they see in their environment has to do what they see in society. Things like Black Lives Matter and racism and all of those kinds of things.

I spent a year working with high school students with autism. And it just baffled me how aware they were about the political climate and just things that are going on. Because I normally work with younger kids, so some of the questions that they came to me with and some of their concerns were very adult and had to do with racism, it had to do with gun laws, it had to do with elections. They're aware of these things and those things weigh heavily on them.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Let me jump to Dr. Kirwan. Congratulations for doing what we don't do enough in this country and looking to what's working in other countries around the world. You mentioned early childhood education is one of the five principles. The general assumption is that in a nation where most working-class people, mom and dad are both working, what is the quality of early childhood education that allows kids to do well in the first grade in this country right now?

Dr. KIRWAN. Senator, can I tell you what we're doing in Maryland now through the Blueprint on this very issue?

The CHAIR. What did you see? I mean, what I want to know is, our kid's mom and dad have to work. Because despite some peoples thought that we are the envy of the world economically, 60 percent of our people are living paycheck to paycheck, struggling to put bread and food on the table.

Dr. KIRWAN. Right.

The CHAIR. Is our childcare system in this country providing well for the kids, enabling them to do well as they enter to school?

Dr. KIRWAN. No, it is not.

The CHAIR. What are you doing about it in Maryland?

Dr. KIRWAN. Well, it's a very important component of the Blueprint, it's pillar one of the Blueprint. And so, we've done a number of things. We've created and expanded centers around the state that work with low-income parents from zero to three, on issues of nutrition, child rearing, child development. We've also as part of

the Blueprint created free full day, high quality preschool for all low-income children.

The CHAIR. Are people taking advantage of it?

Dr. KIRWAN. Absolutely. Yes, indeed they are. And we've seen already in our assessments at kindergarten level, our children ready to learn, a significant increase in Maryland because of these preschools. It has another benefit, not just for the children. When there is free full day preschool available, parents can work and it has a benefit for the family beyond just the development of the child.

The CHAIR. That's a very important point.

Senator Cassidy.

Senator CASSIDY. Just to make the point, because people have spoken about children being hungry or, or not having glasses, that sort of thing. But I will point out that we have Federal programs which provide free lunch and breakfast for high poverty districts. And there is the early and periodic screening, diagnosis, and prevention program part of Medicaid, which screens for vision. I'm not minimizing the challenges, but I also don't want to ignore that which has already been done. And Dr. Kirwan and I both know that Maryland has both these programs.

Ms. Neily look at that, spending is way up relative to inflation. Oh, I should also say, I asked unanimous consent to enter into the record a report from Illinois Policy showing that Chicago Public School spending has increased 97 percent while student achievement has dropped by 63 percent in reading and 78 percent in math.

The CHAIR. Without objection.

[The following information can be found on page 57 in Additional Material:]

Senator CASSIDY. Ms. Neily, look at that. How do we begin to restore the trust when folks say we need to spend more money, but we see so much more money being spent and yet scores are falling?

Ms. NEILY. Well, let's remember that this illustrious body spend \$187 billion in the wake of the pandemic to address learning loss. In the State of Wisconsin, 28.2 percent, more than one out of every \$4 of Wisconsin ESSER money was allocated toward new additions or renovations despite that not addressing learning loss.

When all those bills were passed, I think many parents, myself included, assumed that it would be to help reopen schools, for masks, for air purifiers, for sanitation. That is not what that ESSER money was spent on. It was spent on pet projects, it was spent on social emotional learning, it was spent on things like that. And in many cases, districts did not open.

Children in inner cities were set back years and years and years. I mean, I remember seeing from Virginia, one of the Virginia education association speakers said that, the nice thing about this is that everyone went back equally. That's not true.

Everyone wasn't set back equally by the pandemic. Those who were more set back were families that didn't have the time or resources to help their children read, to pay for tutors or things like

that. This disproportionately hurt low-income students more than anyone else.

You have more money that has been thrown at schools. They can't spend it fast enough. All this ESSER money is running out at the end of the September. And yet now we still see teacher shortages.

Let's talk about in Hartford, they're about to lay off 300 teachers in San Diego. They just laid off 234 and are announcing that they're laying off 60 more. There are teachers coming out of our ears. They're not in the right places right now. So, we don't have a teacher shortage, we have an allocation issue. And that is what is hugely concerning, particularly when we look at the fact that our children cannot read. They are not thriving. They are doing very, very badly.

Senator CASSIDY. Mr. Pondiscio, you're nodding your head yes as she spoke. What would you add to her comments?

Mr. PONDISCIO. As a former teacher, now policy advocate, I remember my first days in the policy world, and it was a surprise to me then and still is, how little those of us who think of ourselves as policymakers spend thinking about what kids do all day. Curriculum, instruction, school culture, perhaps it's because I'm a former teacher. Those are the focus of my work, and I think that we give insufficient attention to that.

I would call your attention to a remarkable series of reports over the last couple of years produced by a woman named Emily Hanford of American Public Media, who has documented the frankly appalling way that we teach reading to children in America. And it's fascinating because it says something about our expert class, it says something about teacher training, that we know how to do this, we train teachers badly. Her reports were called *Hard Words and Sold*. Please.

Senator CASSIDY. It seems as if you are indicting teacher training very much so. That universities, colleges are doing a poor job of preparing teachers for the classroom.

Mr. PONDISCIO. No question.

Senator CASSIDY. Is there a statistical relationship between some universities and their Department of Educations and poor performance by their graduates in certain schools?

Mr. PONDISCIO. I'm sure there is. But I think perhaps at the risk of painting with too broad of a brush, the larger problem is that I'm not sure that our colleges of education view it as their job to train teachers. In my written testimony—

Senator CASSIDY. Wait, I'm sorry. That just strikes me as odd.

Mr. PONDISCIO. Yes, that's correct, Senator. And it should strike you as odd. In other words, they may be more concerned with your professional disposition and with theory as opposed to the practical means of controlling a classroom, of curriculum, of instruction.

Senator CASSIDY. In my limited time, Mr. Keyes points out that some of the kids do present with emotional disorder, et cetera. You point out that teachers are being asked to wear many hats and so therefore distracts them from their primary function. But granted that some kids—now granted it may be the kids who are from a

poorer background, what do we do about that kind of set of issues that are there in addition to—

Mr. PONDISCIO. I don't want to diminish the reality of that, Senator, it's absolutely a fact. The question that we seldom ask is why are we asking, what in many cases is the poorest performing institution in a community, to do more, to be a social services provider, to provide services beyond their core function? In other words, are there other NGO's? Are there other organizations in a stressed-out community that would be better suited to be a mental health provider, to be a social services provider than putting all of this on the back of our teachers.

Senator CASSIDY. A school-based clinic with mental health professionals embedded within a school with a high need would be a better alternative than asking teachers to do that.

Mr. PONDISCIO. That's complicated, whether it should be based in the school. Again, the need is real. Whether you want a low functioning institution with all respect, to be the service provider, and supervise and hold that service accountable, is the question to be asked.

Senator KAINE. Thank you.

Senator Baldwin.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. I want to thank you all for appearing here today, and especially to our teachers on the panel. You do the essential work of educating our children, oftentimes doing whatever it takes to ensure that your students have access to the information and materials that they need to learn.

But we know that comes at a cost, and we need to make more investments in you, our Nation's educators. Wisconsin is facing what our state superintendent of public instruction Jill Underly, has referred to as an education workforce in crisis. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction recently released their annual report on educator preparation and workforce in our state.

This year's report found that we have shortcomings, including with teacher retention. Four out of every 10 teachers either leave the profession or leave the state in their first 6 years. This shortage of teachers is especially pronounced when it comes to special education teachers. 74 percent of the schools in Wisconsin, state that they have one or more vacancies for a special education educator, and more than a third of those schools were not able to find a teacher to fill that vacancy.

Dr. Kirwan, I want to thank you for your testimony. Educators are the key in-School factor for student success, and I appreciate your testimonies that focus on the need to support and pay them accordingly. I want to focus on the fourth pillar of Maryland's plan, related to investments in students from low-income families and multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

Last year, the House Education Appropriations bill crafted by the House Republicans would have cut Federal education investment by 80 percent for Title IA. That's a program that's intended to provide extra support to schools serving low-income students. It also proposed eliminating the \$890 million Title III program that sup-

ports multilingual learners, and it proposed cutting \$2 billion for the Supporting Effective Instruction state grant program.

This year their planned cuts to non-defense spending looks likely to produce a bill that does much of the same that I just described them drafting last year. So, does this sound like the approach of the high performing systems that the commission reviewed? And what would be the ramifications? And can you say something about the government buy-in, in those other countries, Finland, Singapore in Canada for their high performing systems?

Dr. KIRWAN. Yes. Thank you, Senator Baldwin, for that question. As you noted, one of the principles that we discovered in these high performing systems is the investment they make in students with the greatest need, and including most, especially students coming from low-income families.

That's why the Blueprint has really focused on what we call community schools. A community school in Maryland is one that is serving 55 percent or more of low-income students. And these schools get significantly extra funding for tutors, for after school academic program, programming for summer academic program, they have extras health services in the school. They have a coordinator who can connect children in those schools with the social services in the region.

It's our recognition that we need to concentrate resources on these kids that are growing up in very difficult circumstances. And any kind of reduction in Title I funding would just, in my mind, exacerbate the problems we're facing.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. Mr. Keyes, as communities grapple with the shortage of teachers, more schools are establishing, so-called Grow Your Own Programs. These programs are often focused on either introducing and encouraging high school students to pursue the field of education or providing programs focused on helping individuals already in the profession such as paraeducators and substitute teachers gaining teachers licenses.

You have a remarkable story on how you came to the education profession starting as a school bus attendant. I understand you worked as a paid teacher resident while earning your teaching credential and master's degree in special education. Can you explain the paraprofessional to teacher program you participated in, and the benefits of these Grow Your Own programs and how the Federal Government can better support these programs?

Mr. KEYES. The Paraprofessional to Teacher program that I was a part of, it's called Para Pathways. Pretty much what it does is open up the pathway to teaching to the paraprofessional staff, many of whom, like myself, have been working in that paraprofessional position for years.

I was a paraprofessional for 16 years. And what it does is it looks at the paraprofessionals based on their level of schooling. If you got some college credits, you start off on this one, if you got a bachelor's, you start here. If you got an associate's, you start here.

I went through the residency program because I had my bachelor's. And what that did was that put me in a position to work under a mentor teacher for a whole school year, meaning I didn't

have to do any student teaching. I didn't have to have a period of time where I was without pay.

To me, the benefit of that was I got to learn the ins and outs of the paperwork side of it. Because when you're working in education and when you work with children every day, regardless of if you're certified or not, how to teach. You know how to be there for your students on every level, from bus attendant to a paraprofessional. You work with these kids every day; you know what you're doing.

What that Pathways program does is it gives an insight on what it takes to deliver the curriculum, what it takes to be effective at the way that you deliver the curriculum, what it takes to understanding the special education laws and the ins and outs of what it is to be a special educator. It also gives you a kind of inside look on some of the different challenges that you're going to face when going into the classroom.

Now, with that Para Pathways program, some of the people who were in the residency portion didn't go through that Pathways program. There were people coming from corporate America, coming from the military, because this, residency program is open to anyone that wants to be a teacher.

What I realized, and what my school Temple University realized, that a lot of the people coming from outside of education, they don't have a clue what it's like in the classroom. And some of them didn't even make it through the program, and some of them made it through the program, but once they got in the classroom on their own, they didn't make it. We have some who quit less than a year in.

I think for me, the grow your own type of program, you have people who have been doing the job, you have people who want to do the job. The only thing that's holding them back is the financial part. I know myself, what held me back years from going back to school was the financial aspect of it, was going into debt.

Like I said, as a classroom assistant, \$16,000 is what you start with and 30 is what you end with. Me looking at that and everything else that I have to do, rent, food, taking care of myself, paying for school was like can't do that. But with this program, it makes it accessible. It makes it something that can happen. It's wonderful.

We got a hundred people who have gone through this program as of fall, and more and more are interested every day because they see the need for high quality teachers, and they see that it's time for them to step up to the plate and be that high quality teacher.

Also, another aspect of the program that hopefully will start to come to fruition, is to start recruiting in high school. Recruiting some of the people who are in high school that may be interested in education, having them start as paraprofessionals, just so that they know what it's like to be in a classroom environment. They know what it's like to teach.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Keyes, if I could ask you to summarize, you're well over time.

Mr. Keyes. Oh, my bad.

[Laughter.]

Mr. KEYES. That's my thing, and I love this program.

Senator Kaine. I let you, because I'm really interested in this.

Mr. KEYES. That's the answer.

Senator Kaine. Thank you. And thanks to all the witnesses. This is a really important topic. I think I have some Virginia teachers in the room, maybe some from Fairfax. They recently had a collective bargaining vote that I applaud you on.

[Applause.]

Senator Kaine. The title of this hearing is long. The piece I'm interested in is teacher shortages and everything that contributes to them, and you've all talked a little bit about that. My wife is a member of the Virginia State Board of Education appointed by the Governor to oversee K-12 schooling in Virginia. She's the last one on the board appointed by a Democratic Governor. Everyone else on the board is appointed by the current Republican Governor. But I can tell you the one non-partisan issue they grapple with is teacher shortages all over the Commonwealth, particularly in high poverty schools.

There was a study out of UVA this spring. 80 percent of all vacant positions were in the 20 percent of schools with the greatest number of vacancies. And those schools tend to be high poverty schools, which tend to be either within central cities or in rural Virginia.

Some of the shortages are acute in some areas. Special ed is a topical area where the shortages are acute, but they're generally acute in high poverty schools. The students who most need good teachers in the classroom are the students likely to be in schools with high numbers of vacancies.

I think you've all done a good job of kind of explaining some of the challenges. One thing that was not mentioned that I do think should be mentioned is teachers fears for their own safety. Some of you touched upon it, but no one mentioned gun violence. Nobody mentioned gun violence.

Teachers do active shooter drills with their kids, that wasn't the case when I was in school. It wasn't really the case when my kids were in the Richmond Public Schools. It's the norm now. And a teacher said to me recently, we all do a moment of silence now and I don't know what the kids are thinking about, but I know what every adult in a school is thinking about during the moment of silence. And it's, let today not be the day, let today not be the day. And that's got to be daunting for teachers and other adults who work in school systems, just like it's daunting for parents.

My kids went to an urban school system, probably 90 percent free and reduced lunch. I didn't worry when I dropped them off in the morning about picking them up at the end of the day. I didn't worry about it. And they finished school just 15 years ago. But this is something that parents worry about now, teachers worry about now, kids worry about now.

I was going to ask that question Mr. Keyes about the Pathway program, because I think that really is a solution. Senator Collins and I have a bill called the PREP Act that looks at Grow Your Own. Because if somebody has been a paraprofessional in the

school system and has demonstrated the ability to compassionately deal with all kinds of students, but they don't have the credential yet to be a teacher, you know they're going to be a successful teacher if you can get them to that credential.

I'm a big supporter of programs like the one you described, and we do have bipartisan legislation to try to advance that here. Mr. Arthur, I wanted to ask you about a part of your background, which was National Teacher Certification. Dr. Kirwan talked a little bit about this.

My experience is in Virginia, but I'm wondering about the Utah experiences. Every once in a while, in Virginia, we would do a one-time bonus for people that got National teacher certification. But then if the budget was bad, next year, it would disappear. So you wouldn't get a continued salary bump and the person who wanted to get board certified next year wouldn't have that incentive to do it.

I think while teacher salary is something that is primarily a state and local responsibility, I think it could at the Federal level be a Federal thing. We're talking about national certification. If we wanted a high percentage of our teachers to have national certification, that could be something at the Federal level that would be smart to incentivize.

Talk a little bit about, were you incentivized in Utah to do this? Did you just take it on because you wanted to do it? What was the Utah program under which you became certified and did it increase your salary?

Mr. ARTHUR. Absolutely, Senator. I receive a stipend every year, both from my district and my state. When I first went through National Board certification, I did so just because I wanted to be better for children. I was motivated by what I was seeing in the classrooms of National Board-certified teachers. But when someone told me I would get paid more, I was like, Okay, that's nice. I won't have to ask my wife so much for the money. And it's not much, it's not enough right now to move people into this.

I get about roughly in Utah, about \$4,000 extra a year or every year because I teach in a Title I school and I teach in a district that supports that. But not all districts do, states have different programs for this. So if there was a way to make sure that teachers across our Country, we're all incentivized to become the most accomplished educator that they could be, the benefits to our children the research shows would be profound.

Senator KAINE. Dr. Kirwan, again, remind me in the Maryland plan, what do you do around National Board Certification?

Dr. KIRWAN. Yes, when a teacher becomes board certified, they get an increase in salary of \$10,000. And that continues in their salary, it is independent of the year. That's part of their base as long as they are board certified. So, when they have to be renewed, they continue.

Senator Kaine, that has had a very interesting consequence. I just learned today in fact, that Maryland led the Nation and the number of teachers who got board certified last year. Maryland is a relatively small state, 6 million people, but it led the Nation more

than California, more than New York. And I think that salary increase has obviously played a big role in making that happen.

Senator KAINÉ. If I could, it's a salary increase but it's a salary increase for doing a lot of work that makes you a better teacher.

Dr. KIRWAN. Absolutely.

Senator KAINÉ. Salary increase, even in your case in Utah where it's somewhat modest, it's a sign of respect for the profession. And so, I think that has a number of positives. And I am now over time, and I'm going to yield to Senator Markey.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much. And I want to start by highlighting that I am proud of the Boston Public School system for their prioritizing of equity and inclusion for their students. They aim to ensure that Black and Brown students have the same opportunities to achieve, and that we address the systemic racism that plagues our schools nationally. And they work hard to guarantee that LGBTQ kids are not shamed for their identity.

I strongly disagree that programs that aim to support and include students based on gender, sexuality, or race detract from student learning. In fact, I'm proud that Boston Public Schools look to include and celebrate all children because that is how we guarantee that every student has the opportunity to grow and to learn.

Right now, one third of K–12 public school staff working full-time make less than \$25,000 per year, less than 25,000 per year, one-third of those staff in public schools in our Country.

I received a letter from a paraprofessional named CJ, who works with students with autism in the Boston Public School system and is a member of the Boston Teachers Union. CJ, like far too many paraprofessionals is being forced to choose between the profession he is called to and basic financial security.

CJ's students and their families will suffer if he has to leave the field of education. But if CJ can't make rent or care for his elderly mother, how can we expect him to stay in the school system? We cannot expect school staff to keep our students safe and healthy and learning when they are paid starvation wages. We need the Pay Teachers Act, and we need a Pay Paraprofessionals and Education Support Staff act as well. Mr. Keyes, how did your wages as a paraprofessional impact you and your students?

Mr. KEYES. My wages as a paraprofessional, how they impacted me. They impact me because I needed a second job. I couldn't survive off of just paraprofessional wages. I was at the 30,000 when I switched over to teaching. Even that wasn't enough. And a lot of my paraprofessional colleagues, they're looking to other districts and they're seeing that there's no real difference in the pay and the things that they deal with, they absolutely deserve to make more money.

My paraprofessionals, they run the show for me when I can't. The last week of school, they did everything because I was so swamped with paperwork. They deserve to be paid for that. Paraprofessionals are teachers, they're just not certified. All of the teachers who I worked with; they treated me with the same level of respect that they wanted to be given in return. So I feel as

though there definitely should be fairness in pay when it comes to paraprofessionals. They're just like me.

Senator MARKEY. Yes. And my first year out of college, I worked for that whole year as a substitute teacher which is not a paraprofessional, but I could also see how indispensable they were to making sure that the school worked.

Mr. KEYES. Couldn't do my job without them.

Senator MARKEY. Mr. Arthur, as a teacher, why is it important to guarantee school buildings are as resilient to climate change as the resilience educators and students demonstrate in the face of intensifying climate crisis?

Mr. ARTHUR. I apologize Senator, could you restate that question?

Senator MARKEY. Yes. Why do we need to ensure that the working conditions of teachers, but also the studying conditions of students are healthy environments within which they will be working?

Mr. ARTHUR. Absolutely. Unhealthy adults, adults who are dealing with stress and burnout have a hard time helping to prepare children to be healthy going forward in life. Our school climates are beautifully determined by the school community in which those people work. And I tell you, it makes me think this graph, I keep looking at it. It's not just because I teach sixth grade math. It's just fascinating to me.

I just, I swear I have sharpies in my room, I change graphs all the time. I just wish I could go up to that graph, cross out spending and write salaries for school staff, and then just like, leave it and watch over the next 5 years what those two cuddled lines do in terms of student achievement.

If suddenly you have fully staffed schools with highly paid, not just teachers, but paraprofessionals, school counselors, and all the other people that are critical in helping to educate and uplift children, then you will not only have better school climates, you'll have better student scores. You'll have everything that we're looking for in education. Like, man, anybody got Sharpie? Thank you.

[Applause.]

Senator MARKEY. No, you're right on the money. And it's why I introduced my Preparing and Retaining All Educators to PARAEducators bill to provide grants to schools for the types of pathway programs that allow school staff to grow and to thrive, increase wages, scholarships for credentialing, further education, and high quality professional development.

It's just essential that every paraprofessional in every state, have access to and financial resources for high quality career pathway programs. I heard you Mr. Keyes. I heard what you were saying. I agree with you. We just have to focus upon the resources to make sure we get that job done.

The CHAIR. Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member for having this hearing. I know I'm running late, we're all juggling different hearings and en-

gements today. But I wanted to start with Mr. Keyes and I really appreciate the work you're doing in Philly.

I wanted to focus on what we all would hope every student has the opportunity to experience, which is a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. With that goal in mind, I'm working to advance bills that will provide schools, educators, and students with the resources they need to thrive. One piece of legislation I've introduced now for a number of years, the Safe Schools Improvement Act would require school districts to establish codes of conduct that specifically prohibit bullying and harassment among students which supports the safety and inclusion of all children.

Another bill I've recently introduced is the Showing Up for Students Act, which will provide additional funding for the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education. This office's mission is to ensure that all students have equal access to education, that all students can learn in a safe and supportive classroom. This has become especially urgent in the wake of the antisemitism that we see on campuses, but it's also important in every era when we have on, whether it's a college campus or any other educational environment, instances of racism or antisemitism or any kind of discrimination.

The Department of Education is charged with the responsibility to make a determination, a very specific evidence-based fact-based determination as to whether or not there is a hostile environment on that campus or in that school setting for students.

That Office of Civil Rights in no way has the resources that it needs. It needs to hire, in my judgment, hundreds more to carry out its responsibility to complete the investigations they've already undertaken. So I'll continue to fight for that funding. And anyone who says they care about what's happening on our campuses should support the funding for the Office of Civil Rights.

Mr. Keyes, with that predicate, what resources do you need and do you feel that are necessary, both as an educator and as a leader to ensure that all students can succeed, especially students with disabilities in the district?

Mr. KEYES. What resources do I need? Better training, more focused training on the specifics to the populations that we work with, whether it's autism, whether it's a child with multiple disabilities, whether it's somebody who needs learning support.

There needs to be better focused training, not just for teachers, but for paraprofessional staff as well. Because 99 percent of the time, we are the ones training our staff on how to work with these students.

Now, mind you, we have to teach, we got to maintain paperwork, we have to make sure that our kids are happy and healthy and safe. It's a lot of things under the umbrella for the salary that we make. And most of the times you have teachers who are not very well seasoned and able to effectively train their paraprofessional staff because they've never been trained effectively themselves.

I was lucky every teacher I worked with had been there 30-29 years, so I got that training. So what I do is I pass that on to everybody who I crossed paths with within my school, even down to

school climate staff, which a lot of those were former paraprofessionals as well.

That goes in tandem with what you said about making sure that children are safe and they're able to access their education and not have to deal with all of the harsh realities of the world that we're dealing with while they're in that school building.

Senator CASEY. I appreciate that, and I appreciate your leadership and the fact that you've served as both a teacher and a paraprofessional, I think indicates your experience is significant.

I wanted to highlight that both the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the district recognizes the talent and dedication of their paraprofessionals in their thinking of ways to creatively address the teacher shortage. What aspects of the paraprofessional to teacher program were most helpful to you? And second, what can the Federal Government do to encourage the development of these Grow Your Own programs at the local level?

Mr. KEYES. What was most helpful to me, and what's going to be most helpful to my colleagues, is eliminating that debt that comes along with going back to school. Because again, when you think about paraprofessionals, remember, they're some of the lowest paid in education. They still have to survive out here in the world while they're trying to get to that next level of their career.

Even myself, I didn't have to pay for this master's degree, but I got two other degrees that coming soon, I'm going to have to start paying back. So the financial aspect was the most helpful part of it. And what kind of scares me about it is there's no guarantee that money is going to be there in the future.

I think the Federal Government can help by ensuring that there's funding for a program such as the Para Pathways program to again, promote and grow your own, because you have the people there, you have the teachers there already. They just need that last bit of help.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR. Senator Hickenlooper.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for being here. I'm going to try and get in three questions. So, I'm going to cutoff the answers at about 40 seconds. Famous last words. Dr. Kirwan you talked a little bit about learning things from other countries. In Colorado, we've worked a lot on creating apprenticeship programs. We studied, took a whole group, 50 people to Switzerland to study their processes. How have you seen other countries use apprenticeships to recruit and retain educators?

Dr. KIRWAN. Senator Hickenlooper, thank you for that question. The commission I chaired studied in great depth these apprenticeship programs. And were so impressed by the impact they're having on the economy in these countries, and so we have built that into the Blueprint.

The goal of the Blueprint is to get most kids to career and college ready by the end of the 10th grade. And then they have the option of three pathways; One would be advanced placement, another would be early college, and a third pathway is a career and technical education pathway.

In that pathway, students would be expected to complete an apprenticeship or some other industry certified credential just based exactly on what we learn from these countries. Not every kid needs to go to college. There are wonderful jobs out there.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I got it. And I'm going to cut you off. I apologize. Thank you. This is a new Hickenlooper at the table. Mr. Keyes, I think that the experience as a paraprofessional and an educator, teacher, is so valuable.

Earlier this year the Walton Family Foundation in Gallup did a poll that showed that 48 percent of Gen Z, middle and high school students feel motivated to go to school. That's 48 percent. The rest don't. I think it's critical that kids feel inspired and motivated to go to school. And whether you're going into apprenticeship or 2-year program, a 4-year program.

What should we be doing to reach out to students who may be struggling to find inspiration at the school where they're at? How can we reach out to them in the first place to encourage them to consider a future career, let's say in teaching, when they're struggling in school themselves?

Mr. KEYES. What I would say is give them options. Show them that it's not—while they might be having difficulties, now you provide additional supplemental support. You give them options on what's next. Like myself, I didn't go to college right out of high school. I wish that I had someone sit down with me and explain it. Well, you can do this, well, you can move into a technical school. You can do career training.

There are so many different options out there. School is hard. It is. But when you have somebody in your corner supporting you, it makes it a little less hard and it makes you want to push through, so to speak.

Another thing that we could do as far as recruiting those same students into education, offering them positions, starting off at the lower tiered education positions such as bus attendant and paraprofessional. These allow them time to figure out what they want to do. And if it's for them, like it did for me.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. I like it. Nice. Appreciate that. Thank you. And then I want to talk a little bit about early literacy. And I think this notion of how do we get the right guidance counselors, the right support? I think Dr. Kirwan, you've made that clear that that's a big part of this. I look at and I have struggled when I was younger, still struggle with dyslexia, very, very slow reader. Senator Cassidy and I have both worked on this in various ways.

I look at the recent assessment by the NAEP that 33 percent of fourth graders were reading at grade level. That's unacceptable and obviously several points back from where we slipped in 2019 from where we were. Mr. Pondiscio, what does your research experience tell you about why so many people are still struggling? And what does the Federal Government need to do to better to prepare teachers, students, to significantly improve the literacy?

Mr. PONDISCIO. The bad news is we've struggled to teach reading properly for decades. The good news is we have an emerging so-called Science of Reading movement in this country which I'm en-

couraged by with a caveat. If we have the idea that, is it loose in the land, that it's, about phonics then we will fall short.

I like to point out that in my South Bronx classroom, which was literally the lowest performing school in New York City's lowest performing district, where I taught for several years, I literally never had a single child who was a non-reader. They could all decode, as we say, the kids could read, they struggled with comprehension. So I'm optimistic about the science of reading movement. It should be encouraged at all levels of government. But that's the starting line. The decoding and phonics practices get kids to the starting line.

I am a disciple of a man named Eric Hirsch Jr. who's the son of Virginia, and his core knowledge curriculum because that's exactly what my students in the South Bronx were lacking. Rich contents in history, in art, in music in literature, et cetera. Once we get kids to the decoding starting line, then it's all that rich vocabulary and content that needs to be encouraged in order for kids to become language proficient.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Appreciate that. I'm over time, I apologize.

The CHAIR. It's the old Senator Hickenlooper.

[Laughter.]

Senator HICKENLOOPER. No, no. I was in under the wire there with the question.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Cassidy, do you want to say yours?

Senator CASSIDY. Yes. Mr. Arthur said he would love to take this graph, which shows spending in schools far exceeding the inflation rate, yet scores going down and change it in which he would look at teacher pay.

I think you agree with Ms. Neily. She pointed out that there's a lot of money going for things which seem unrelated to instruction. And in the document, which I submitted for adoption, it points out that there's a school in Chicago, with 35 students in a building which holds over 900 and there are 23 staffers. The average cost per student is \$68,000.

Let's assume there's two teachers there, say four, it's a lot of money. And that the union will not let them close the huge building for these 35 students. And indeed, their latest contract wants to add eight more staffers. There'll be 33 staffers for 35 students.

I think that if there's a conclusion from this, it is that there is a misallocation of dollars. And if you want to raise teacher pay, recognizing how much more spending we're doing, we have to focus on teachers and not on things which are extraneous. I yield back.

The CHAIR. I think when we look at the issue of education in America and the significant challenges we face, it's also important to take a look at how as a nation we feel about our kids. Are our children a very high priority? Does anyone really think that as a Nation, we believe that?

Now, if we believe that, we would not have 9 million children living in poverty, we would not have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any nation on earth. Dr. Kirwan has looked at countries around the world, many countries around the world understand that the most important years of emotional and intellectual development are 0 through 5. That's what we are told by every psychologist who studies the issue.

Yet, we have a childcare system, which (a), is unaffordable for millions of working-class families, (b), pays childcare workers even worse than we pay public school educators. People are working for less than at McDonald's, doing some of the most important work in the country.

Yet, as Dr. Kirwan mentioned, there are countries around the world, and perhaps Maryland is beginning to do that. He'll say what? Childcare is enormously important. If kids are going to get off to a good start in life, open the doors. Let's have decent paid teachers, and let's not worry about the cost of that because we're going to save money long term if these kids do well in school. Okay?

I think as a Nation, we do have to ask ourselves a fundamental question about our priorities. If four hedge fund managers today, at a time when we have massive income, wealth inequality in America, four hedge company executives making more money than every kindergarten teacher in this country, maybe there's something wrong with our national priorities.

This country does not survive unless we have the best education in the world for our kids, we're not going to compete economically. We're not going to see our kids flourish.

I'm always impressed that when it comes to defense spending, hey, we could spend a trillion dollars a year. Bills come out of committee, 20 to 1, no debate. Massive tax breaks to billionaires, hey, not a problem. But maybe to address why it is that we're paying teachers in this country, inadequate wages, oh my word, just an impossible task, Federal Government can't get involved in it.

I think it's time, not only to take a hard look at education in general, but to take a look at our national priorities and to take a look at how we treat the children of our Country. With that, this hearing comes to an end.

Any Senators who wish to ask additional questions must do so by June 27th at 5 p.m.

The CHAIR. The Committee stands adjourned. Thank you.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION FAILS TO TURN \$68K PER STUDENT INTO EVEN 1 ACADEMIC WIN

by Hannah Schmid JUNE 14, 2024



Douglass Academy High School had 35 students with nearly 900 seats unfilled. None were proficient on the SAT. The Chicago Teachers Union wants to add at least eight staffers there and at every other school in the district at a cost of \$1.7 billion.

Only 35 students enrolled in Douglass Academy High School for the 2023-2024 school year, but the building can hold over 900 students.

Logic would say it should be closed, but the Chicago Teachers Union prohibits closing it and other underused schools. In fact, CTU sees the 23 staffers at Douglass as inadequate.

<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-teachers-union-fails-to-turn-68k-per-student-into-even-1-academic-win/>

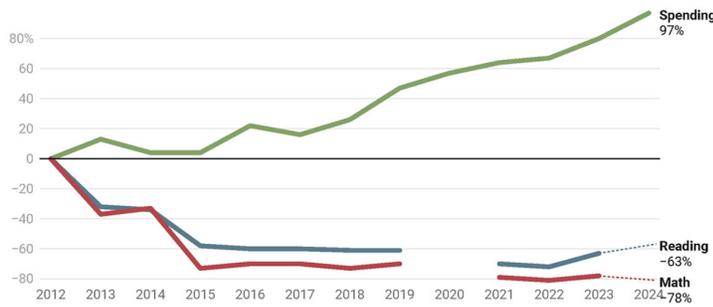
CTU's new contract demands would put at least eight additional staff members in the school. That would mean 31 staff members for 35 students.

Douglass already spends over \$68,000 per student. All that money and all that potential staff attention, yet it failed to produce even a single student who was proficient in either reading or math on a recent SAT.

CTU's leaked contract is filled with costly demands, including additional staff members at every school which will cost Chicago Public Schools an estimated \$1.7 billion and threatens to increase Douglass' already exorbitant per-student spending. The new demands that could be estimated tallied over \$10 billion, with billions more than could not be accurately calculated.

Chicago school spending nearly doubles as scores drop

Cumulative percent change in student proficiency in math and reading compared to Chicago Public Schools spending from state and local sources, FY2012-2024



In 2015, Illinois adopted common core standards for testing. Proficiency data unavailable for 2020 and 2024
 Chart: @illinoispolicy • Source: CPS budgets, Illinois State Board of Education • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

If anything, the numbers show the more Chicago spends on public education, the worse the academic results.

Douglass Academy High School spends the most in CPS, but sees some of the worst results

Douglass Academy High School spends \$68,091 per student compared to the district's average of \$18,287. That spending encompasses "site-based expenditures," which is defined as "the total

<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-teachers-union-fails-to-turn-68k-per-student-into-even-1-academic-win/>

of per-pupil school-level expenditures and per-pupil centralized expenditures funded by federal and state/local source of funds.” Those expenditures include the cost of school staff, transportation and central office staff.

Douglass Academy High School spends the most per student compared to any other school in CPS, according to the Illinois State Board of Education's [2023 Report Card](#).

With that kind of spending, one would expect academic proficiency to soar, but that's not the case.

The [most recent](#) test data available shows no 11th grade students could read or perform math at grade level on the SAT in the 2021-2022 school year, and 86% of tested students scored in the lowest proficiency level for reading. Test data is not available for the 2022-2023 school year. It has been [redacted](#) according to ISBE's rules for results involving fewer than 10 students.

The last school year in which any 11th-grade Douglass students could read or perform math at grade level was the 2016-2017 school year. Just 2.4% of students could read or perform math proficiently then.

The school also experiences an absenteeism problem. In the 2022-2023 school year, [64%](#) of students were chronically absent, outpacing the district average of 40%. Also, nearly [half](#) of the teachers at Douglass had 10 or more absences during the school year.

Not only are many students and teachers missing instruction days, but countless seats at Douglass Academy High School have been left empty. The school can fit over 900 students, yet only 35 students are enrolled. Only 4% of the building's [ideal capacity](#) is being met. Douglass Academy High School is the emptiest school in CPS.

CTU demands would mandate additional staff at Douglass Academy High School

As of March 2024, Douglass Academy High School had 23 full-time staff members for its 35 enrolled students, according to CPS' [employee position files](#). CTU wants to add at least eight staff members to the school's roster, a nearly 35% increase.

CTU's leaked contract demands include adding multiple staff positions to every school in CPS. The new positions include: librarian, librarian assistant, social worker, newcomer liaison, case manager, restorative justice coordinator, reading specialist and interventionist (elementary schools), three elective teachers (middle schools), technology coordinator, "Climate Champion," and gender support coordinator and/or LGBTQ+ lead/specialist and option to expand LGBTQ+ faculty support teams at each school.

Douglass Academy High School already has a technology coordinator on staff, but CTU's demands would mean the addition of the other eight new positions to the school's employee roster.

With fewer than 10 incoming freshmen each year, it's hard to imagine what a newcomer liaison would do each workday or how much assisting an assistant librarian could do.

The total additional cost to CPS districtwide for the new staff members is estimated to be \$1.7 billion. The addition of eight staff members to Douglass Academy High School threatens to increase the school's already highest-in-the-district spending per student.

CTU more concerned with union jobs than student outcomes

While about three-quarters of students in CPS can't read at grade level and even fewer can do math, CTU leadership is pushing a lengthy list of costly demands. Many of these demands don't impact learning in the classroom. Those include housing for migrant students, subsidies for weight-loss surgery and drugs such as Ozempic, and environmental initiatives such as an electric school bus fleet.

Students at Douglass are struggling in the classroom. Chicagoans and CPS parents have already expressed their concern about "students not learning enough academically" in CPS. Still, CTU seems oblivious as it pushes expensive demands for new staff members rather than prioritizing students' outcomes.

A public negotiating session is planned 5-7 p.m. Friday, June 14, at Marquette Elementary School, 6550 S. Richmond St. in the Chicago Lawn neighborhood. It is a chance for taxpayers to share their views on what CTU is doing and what it deserves in a new contract.

[Whereupon, at 10:43 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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