

DATE: October 25, 2023

RE: The House Committee on Ways and Means held a hearing, "Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers," which examined education, job training, and preparation for the workforce.

Witness Panel

- **Corey DeAngelis**, Senior Fellow, American Federation for Children, [Testimony](#)
- **Hera Varmah**, Communications and Events Assistant, American Federation for Children, [Testimony](#)
- **Jerome Redmond**, President and CEO, American Truck Training, [Testimony](#)
- **Sharon Sedlar**, Parent and Founder, PA Families for Education Choice, [Testimony](#)
- **Girard Melancon**, Board Chair, National Skills Coalition, [Testimony](#)

Overview:

On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, the House Committee on Ways and Means held a hearing, " Educational Freedom and Opportunity for American Families, Students, and Workers."

Please see the full details of the hearing [here](#).

Opening Statements

Chairman Jason Smith (R-MO)

- Parents have concerns about access to affordable, quality education. Our education system is producing declining results. The education system has become increasingly politicized.
- Parents are moving to private, home, and charter schools to guarantee their children's education. Congress should remove financial barriers to help them.
- Congress should expand 529 accounts. It should be amended to cover books and tutoring, educational therapy, and supplies for homeschoolers. It should also cover skilled trade and licensing programs to address America's skilled labor shortage.
- Colleges refuse to condemn pro-Hamas statements of their students and professors and continue to raise tuition and make higher education unaffordable. Congress should reconsider the 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status and favorable treatment of college endowments for colleges.
- Congress should expand student access to education choices.

Ranking Member Richard Neal (D-MA)

- Recent Democratic legislation has and will continue to help the economy and create new jobs.
- The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is ushering in good-paying jobs that do not require a four-year degree.
- Biden's new American Climate Corps will help train people for and create new jobs.

Witness Testimony:

Corey DeAngelis

- We should expand tax credit scholarships and the scope of 529 accounts.
- School choice allows parents to take their funding to private or public education providers of their choice.

- Teachers' unions and their push for remote learning have harmed school quality. The fight to maintain K-12 public education is dominated by the interest of securing teachers' unions.
- Parents should be able to choose schools that align with their values.
- School choice would promote competition and increased quality among public schools. It would allow parents to choose K-12 education in the same way as higher education.

Hera Varmah

- School choice allows children to attend schools that fit their personality, goals, and values. Without school choice, many children would lose opportunities to find education that is right for them.
- School choice should be encouraged because it leads to greater academic improvement.
- Congress should pass the Educational Choice for Children Act.

Jerome Redmond

- Job training like that offered by American Truck Training expands opportunities for those without higher education or high income.
- The Freedom To Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act (H.R. 1477), which would allow postsecondary credentials to be treated as higher education expenses in 529 accounts, should be passed. It would expand education opportunities for lower-income applicants or applicants without education.

Sharon Sedlar

- Subsidized school choice would allow children to move out of schools that are harmful to their health or insufficient to help them succeed.
- Congress should pass legislation to take caps off school choice scholarships and expand school choice subsidization.

Girard Melancon

- The IRA and similar legislation will open up jobs and job training opportunities in manufacturing, transportation, and construction through its investments in the clean energy industry.
- TAG (Transfer Admission Guarantee) programs for community college training and admissions are an excellent idea to help with this.
- The U.S. needs to invest more in programs that grant funding for job training and allow workers to access new and stable jobs.

Question and Answer

- **Chairman Smith** asked Redmond to discuss the impact of expanding 529 accounts to cover technical skills training.
 - Redmond said that expanding 529 coverage would allow people to access funds for technical skills training that they might not otherwise be able to pay for.
 - Smith asked DeAngelis to speak about expanding 529 coverage to homeschooling. DeAngelis said expanding such coverage would allow children to get better results from schools they believe are best for them, rather than letting "teachers' unions and bureaucrats" restrict school choice access. It would also incentivize public schools to "up their game" and compete with other schools.

- Smith asked Varmah how Congress should consider expanding school choice. Varmah said that Congress should pass the Educational Choice for Children Act, which would expand school choice to all states and let poorer families find better education opportunities.
 - Smith asked Sedlar how expanding 529 accounts to tutoring and therapy would help families. Sedlar said that such proposals would give parents more resources and flexibility in addressing their children’s educational needs.
- **Ranking Member Richard Neal** said the IRA expanded the need for workers and more technical training. He expressed a desire for more investment in community college and asked Melancon if he thought that was a good idea.
 - Melancon said that more job training opportunities and investment in community colleges to expand their own job training initiatives would be beneficial. Enacting a “second round” of TAG programs would help to address the need to fill the new clean energy industry’s workforce.
- **Representative Vern Buchanan (R-FL)** asked Varmah why she thought Florida had improved its educational results so quickly in such a short time.
 - Varmah said that school choice was responsible because it allowed competition between schools, which inspires better results and higher quality education institutions.
- **Representative Lloyd Doggett (D-TX)** said that school choice initiatives would “starve” public school funding and voiced his opposition to the Educational Choice for Children Act.
- **Representative Adrian Smith (R-NE)** said that the Education Choice for Children Act would not touch public school funding and said special interests drove that opposition to school choice. He asked DeAngelis if he believed school choice would discriminate based on race.
 - DeAngelis said that the current system was "discrimination based on zip code" and that school choice led to school integration because the current system was already so segregated.
 - Smith asked Varmah if she agreed with the claim that “only public schools can create the foundation for our democracy.” Varmah said that she disagreed and said that school choice was more democratic, as it allowed parents more choice in their children’s education.
- **Representative Mike Kelly (R-PA)** said that he supported expanding opportunities for education, both for K-12 school choice and adult job training. He asked each witness to speak about why school choice is important to them.
 - Sedlar said that school choice allowed parents to put their kids in a school system that would work best for them.
 - Redmond said that expanding access to education allows children to get jobs and responsibility.
 - Varmah said that school choice allows children to choose the best school for them at the most critical point in their development.
- **Representative Bill Pascrell (D-NJ)** asked Melancon whether the IRA’s investments would create more job opportunities.
 - Melancon said that the IRA’s investments in infrastructure would create more jobs to repair infrastructure as well as in the growing clean energy industry. He said it is important to expand community college programs that provide skill training in response to the rapid changes in technology and the job market.
- **Representative David Schweikert (R-AZ)** asked how job training might accommodate rapid changes in technology and how to “future-proof” legislation around job training.

- Redmond said that it is important to be flexible in changing its curriculum to address technological advancements. DeAngelis said that school choice would allow children to choose schools that would best teach them the modern skills they need to succeed, as well as the need for the government itself to “future-proof” its legislation.
- **Representative Brad Wenstrup (R-OH)** asked DeAngelis what the effect of school choice would be in rural areas where there were fewer alternatives.
 - DeAngelis said that expanding school choice would create new demand for private schools in rural areas. He said that expanding 529 accounts would also allow parents to pay for alternatives or other programs, even in rural areas with fewer alternatives.
- **Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA)** asked Melancon to speak about the jobs created by the IRA and what skills were required to perform them.
 - Melancon said that new clean energy technology in legacy crafts required new technical skills to maintain and repair this technology and that this created new opportunities for community college-trained workers in usually inaccessible fields.
 - Thompson asked if it was true that these jobs were higher paying. Melancon said that the pay scale for these jobs had increased "dramatically."
 - Thompson asked if Congress should increase investment in adult education. Melancon said that he agreed and said that Congress had significantly cut similar programs in the past. He said that investing in programs to provide base job knowledge would be valuable.
 - Thompson asked if Melancon thought that IRA investments would help workers in rural areas. Melancon said that he thought it would because infrastructure construction and repair in rural areas would open up job opportunities.
- **Representative Drew Ferguson (R-GA)** asked how school choice could help provide investment in rural public schools if no private schools were available.
 - DeAngelis said that school choice programs should include provisions for subsidizing public school choice as well to maximize the choices that parents had.
 - Ferguson asked if programs like his for other transportation sectors, like aviation, would be helpful. Redmond agreed but said that he could only speak with certainty for his own industry.
- **Representative Ron Estes (R-KS)** said that it was important to expand coverage of 529 accounts and education tax credits for scholarship-granting organizations. He asked DeAngelis to explain how private school scholarships were funded.
 - DeAngelis said that opposition to public funding for private school scholarships was inconsistent with public support for grants to public colleges or other public programs.
 - Estes asked DeAngelis how public schools would rise to compete with private schools if school choice was enacted. DeAngelis said that schools are only partially funded by enrollment counts and that public schools keep the non-enrollment funding, which will help them stay afloat and compete with other schools.
- **Representative Danny Davis (D-IL)** asked Melancon if he thought that helping incumbent workers adapt to new requirements or technology was complementary to training new workers.
 - Melancon said he agreed. Tax credits to train incumbent workers in new programs and technology would be a good idea to keep workers employed and trained correctly.
 - Davis asked about the differences between specific Illinois community colleges. Melancon said that specific colleges may have different technical training programs, which was true across the country.

- **Representative Lloyd Smucker (R-PA)** said he supported the Educational Choice for Children Act and school choice. He said that the federal government should dedicate more funding to employment training programs like the one Redmond works with.
- **Representative Carol Miller (R-WV)** asked DeAngelis if he believed school choice would allow parents to protect their children from “radical left” curriculums.
 - DeAngelis said that school choice would help families choose schools that align with their own values and avoid the "indoctrination" that was taking place in public schools.
 - Miller asked how expanding 529 accounts to encompass job training programs would help resolve unemployment. Redmond said that expanding 529 accounts would expand job opportunities by relieving the financial pressure of tuition or vocational training payments.
- **Representative Linda Sanchez (D-CA)** asked how the IRA had improved the clean energy employment pipeline.
 - Melancon said that the IRA had created lots of new jobs in creating and maintaining green infrastructure through its investments in clean energy industries and projects.
- **Representative Greg Murphy (R-NC)** said that problems in education today were the effects of Great Society programs, which encouraged strife between public and private schools and did not incentivize parents to fully support their children.
- **Representative Kevin Hern (R-OK)** said he was introducing the Student Empowerment Act, which would expand 529 accounts to cover tutoring, standardized testing fees, and disability program expenses. He asked DeAngelis why it was important to expand 529 accounts.
 - DeAngelis said that expanding 529 accounts to allow for maximum customization of their child's education would lead to the best outcomes for each student's specific needs and were likely to improve both educational and social benefits for students.
 - Hern asked Sedlar if she believed school choice would help parents tailor their children’s education to fit their needs. Sedlar said she emphatically agreed.
- **Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI)** asked Melancon how community colleges would get young adults involved in green energy jobs.
 - Melancon said that mere exposure to green energy job training is helpful, especially since the trades will usually get significant amounts of employment anyway.
 - Moore said that school choice would keep money from going to public schools and would give money to private schools that may engage in discriminatory processes.
- **Representative Greg Steube (R-FL)** said he was in favor of expanding access to 529 accounts and asked what role the teachers’ unions had in keeping schools closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - DeAngelis said that the teachers’ unions were responsible for keeping schools closed during the pandemic and claimed that in places where private schools were open, competition forced public schools to remain open as well.
 - Steube asked how legislation like the Educational Choice for Children Act could help children. Varmah said that giving parents choices and control over where their children went would be best for children’s accomplishments and growth.
- **Representative Blake Moore (R-UT)** asked DeAngelis what Congress could do to keep education affordable.
 - DeAngelis said that increasing competition between schools would lead to higher teacher salaries and lower administrative bloat, which would increase efficiency and affordability for public schooling.

- Moore asked if 529 accounts should be expanded to include technical education. Redmond said that he agreed, and it allowed young adults who do not feel college is for them to find good-paying employment in technical sectors.
- **Representative Dwight Evans (D-PA)** asked Melancon to speak about how federal investment in green infrastructure could create jobs in underserved communities.
 - Melancon said that the federal investments and partnership with community technical colleges had great potential to engage students who did not thrive in standard schooling or did not have relatives or contacts in trade industries.
 - Evans asked what advice Melancon would give to redesign college systems for students who could only afford to go to school part-time. Melancon said that opening part-time job training programs and Pell grants could help open the door to jobs where those students could get on-the-job training.
- **Representative Randy Feenstra (R-IA)** asked how DeAngelis saw government grants and programs for school choice playing out on the state level.
 - DeAngelis said that many states had already rolled out school choice programs and that federal support for it would not necessitate government money going to the program or any great changes to the existing programs.
 - Feenstra asked Redmond if employers in the trucking industry paid to send their employees to school. Redmond said that this sometimes happened, but it was rare, and that it usually happened if the employee had money to pay for their education.
 - Feenstra asked Varmah if she thought that federal involvement in school choice would expand the number of states using school choice programs. Varmah said that she did and that this was a good thing.
- **Representative Beth Van Duyne (R-TX)** asked DeAngelis if he had a response to Representative Doggett's earlier opinions (*that school choice initiatives would "starve" public school funding*).
 - DeAngelis said that school choice would make school more affordable and higher quality for both public and private schools.
 - Van Duyne asked where government education expenditures were going. DeAngelis said that the money was going to administrative bloat and teachers' union officials, not teacher salaries or school programs.
 - Van Duyne asked if more government expenditure on education had produced better results. DeAngelis said that it does not and said that since giving money to schools had failed, the money should go to private citizens.
- **Representative Don Beyer (D-VA)** asked Melancon what the government could do to encourage job training programs for green infrastructure across the country.
 - Melancon said that models like those were going to be adopted across the country in many energy sectors, which would open up employment opportunities for many underprivileged workers across the country. He credited the IRA's investments for this positive change.
 - Beyer asked what the U.S. could do to make apprenticeships more attractive to job seekers. Melancon said that making those apprenticeships more well-known both to parents and kids could introduce job-seekers to opportunities and make apprenticeships more appealing.
- **Representative Mike Carey (R-OH)** asked Redmond if he supported the Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act, which would permit the use of 529 funds to pay for credential and training program expenses.

- Redmond said that he supported such a measure because it lifts the financial burden of paying for training from training-seekers.
 - Beyer asked what the U.S. could do to make apprenticeships more attractive to job seekers. Melancon said that making those apprenticeships more well-known both to parents and kids could introduce job-seekers to opportunities and make apprenticeships more appealing.
- **Representative Jodey Arrington (R-TX)** asked Sedler what the “return on investment” is in expanding school choice for K-12 children.
 - Sedler said that private schools are statistically proven to improve the educational outcomes of their students but said that the choice should still extend to public schools as well. DeAngelis said that school choice mechanisms substantially increase parental satisfaction and safety for their children.