

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE VALUE OF SCHOOL CHOICE

THE RELEASE OF THE 2013 EDUCATION CHOICE AND
COMPETITION INDEX, FEATURING A CONVERSATION WITH
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER ERIC CANTOR

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday January 8, 2014

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WHITEHURST: Well, good afternoon. I thank you for joining us. We're in the middle of a tropical heat wave here -- at least compared to yesterday. So, it's good for you to come out and be with us today for the 2013 release of the Education Choice and Competition Index.

I'm Russ Whitehurst. I'm Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy, here at Brookings.

So, the drill for today is, I'll talk to you a little bit about the report that we released -- copies of which were available outside, and I assume you have one. The written report is really just an introduction to the interactive online information, which is the real substance of the release.

If you'd like to tweet about the event, you'll see the hashtags up on the screens to either side of me -- and, also, the URL to the interactive website is available there.

I've been thinking about what America leads the world in, and it leads the world in many things. But one of the areas I think we don't think much about -- but which is very relevant to our topic today -- is that we undeniably lead the world in shopping.

Think about it. Amazon, eBay, Travelocity, Yelp, OpenTable -- I could on and on with the e-sites that promote shopping. There's also a dizzying array of storefront options for everything from restaurants to physicians. And the storefronts are increasingly supported by digital tools to help us decide on the local restaurant we want to choose or whatever.

And, in fact, freedom, as we understand it, is very much bound to the ability to choose. Our freedom of choice rests on the availability of different providers, of

the services and goods we want. And if one doesn't serve our needs, we turn to another. If we get a bad meal, we try another restaurant next time. If the physician isn't pleasing or the dentist doesn't do what we want, we shop for another.

But whereas most of our economy embraces choice, until recently, our public education system has been a local government monopoly, in which the only choice families could exercise, if they wanted or needed to send their child to a public school, was the choice of where to live. That was available to those who could afford to move where the schools are good. And let's call that status quo "zip code education." You want to buy a good zip code because it's got a good school associated with it.

That's changing, and it's changing in a number of ways. Notably, we see the growth of public charter schools. They did not exist 25 years ago. They presently enroll about five percent of public school students in states which permit the formation of charter schools. They have at least a 20 percent share in 32 large school districts.

Here in the District of Columbia, the charter school representation of the market is now about 45 percent, which is quite extraordinary.

In one of the districts I'll be talking about today, New Orleans, it's about 80 percent. So, that's dramatic growth within a short period of time, in terms of the evolution of our education system.

We see the expansion and technical refinement of open enrollment systems involving traditional public schools, where parents can choose which regular public school they want their child to attend. And they can do that, rather than accepting an assignment that's based on their place of residence.

We see the emergence in Indiana, Louisiana, and Arizona of statewide voucher programs that bring to 12 the number of states that provide a public subsidy for

certain categories of students -- frequently, those with disabilities -- to attend private schools of the parents' choice.

We see continued increases in the availability of technology-based distance and virtual education as an alternative to traditional seat-based education.

In Florida, for example, students can take advantage of the Florida Virtual School, which is free to them, and take a variety of courses in lieu of taking those courses through their traditional public school district.

And, certainly, relevant to our guest speaker today, we've seen the passage in the House of U.S. Representatives of a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a provision of which allows economically-disadvantaged families to take their federal dollars as a backpack with the child to the public school of their choice, including charter schools.

What we do with the Education Choice and Competition Index is, we chronicle these changes, and this is the third iteration. We plan to take the index back in time, so you could look at the status of choice 10 years ago, and to continue to update it annually.

What we do in the index is, look at the 100 largest school districts in America, because that's been the locus of most of the action, in terms of K-12 choice and competition. And we add a few smaller districts that are innovators in choice that we want to examine, as well.

What does it take to get a good score as a geographical area providing choice to families in terms of public education?

Well, first, you need a lot of choice. And this includes good traditional public schools, magnet schools, charter schools, affordable private schools, and virtual

education.

Second, you need a choice process that maximizes the match between parental preference and school assignment. And that would include things like no default; everybody has to choose, rather than parents getting defaulted into a school, and having to fight their way out by exercising choice through a laborious process -- a common application -- so you'll apply once instead of 15 or 20 times -- and really good information on the choices that you're making.

Third, it requires that there be funding and district management processes that favor the growth of popular schools at the expense of unpopular schools. This includes, for example, weighted student funding, so that as a school grows, in terms of its enrollment, the funding grows, as well -- and, likewise, as schools lose students, their funding is reduced.

Interestingly, around the country, even in districts that have embraced choice, there's often a hold-harmless provision such that schools that are losing students in fact prosper. They get smaller class size, and more facilities, and less crowding.

And we'd like to see processes for closing, finally, unpopular schools, rather than letting them linger on for years when nobody really wants to go there.

And, finally, we'd like to see subsidies for the cost involved of choice.

So, if I have choice, and I'm an affluent parent, and I could afford to stay at home, and put my child in my car each morning, and drive the child across town to a school of choice -- whereas, if I'm a poor parent, I have no ability to do that -- that is not an equitable choice architecture. So, we'd like, for example, to see districts covering cost of transportation to schools of choice.

The winners this year, in terms of the Education Choice and Competition

Index are the winners from last year.

In terms of the districts of innovation, it's the Recovery School District in New Orleans, and then Orleans Parish. And these are both, of course, in Louisiana. They are smaller districts, but they are at the forefront of introducing a very extensive and well-designed choice architecture.

Among the larger districts, New York City is in first, as it was last year, then Houston, and Denver.

We've been particularly interested in Denver, which rose from 24th to 5th place last year to this year, based on not a change in the availability of choice, but a change in the way that parents could exercise choice.

So, now they have a one-app process. Parents apply once. They list their schools in preference, and the process is one that matches families with those choices, in a way that minimizes the difference between what they want and what they get.

And it does it in a way that can't be done any better, given that the preferences that parents have expressed -- and so while every family doesn't get its first choice -- and, as a parent, one is understandably distressed when one doesn't get their first choice -- almost every family gets a really good choice -- so that in Denver, in the last year, 83 percent of parents got a school assignment for their child that was their first, second, or third choice. And there were fewer than 400 families in all of Denver that didn't get a choice that was in their top five.

So, it's good to see choice out there. It's good to see districts doing well. If you look at our report, you'll see that nobody is really perfect. Even the best districts have a way to go. But the progress is really encouraging.

And think about it in Denver, two years ago, compared to last year. Two years ago, there were 30 different mechanisms you had to go through to exercise a choice. Different applications for every charter school, different time tables -- it was just a nightmare. And now you do it once; you get the best possible outcome that's available to you. That's real progress.

With that as our introduction to the index for this year, let me turn to what is a great pleasure -- and that is to introduce our speaker, Majority Leader Eric Cantor.

Leader Cantor has his undergraduate degree from George Washington University, his law degree from the College of William & Mary, and a master's degree from Columbia University.

He came to Washington when I did, in 2001. He's been elected every two years since in his district -- that is near Richmond -- by margins that range from very healthy to overwhelming. He's had a meteoric rise in the House, first to position as Minority Whip, and then to Majority Leader.

He's known as a strategic thinker, and is largely known for his involvement in healthcare issues and budget issues heretofore. But he has become a very active voice for education reform.

My attention was drawn to what he's been doing by his offering of a floor amendment to the ESEA reauthorization in the House that offered the Title I portable funding that I talked about previously.

Really, federal funding is an impediment to choice, because it's delivered through a mechanism through central districts that doesn't allow funding to transparently follow kids. And so a change in federal legislation that let money follow kids would be great.

He has recently been visiting schools of choice around the country -- Denver, Philadelphia, New Orleans, D.C. -- to get a sense on the ground of what's happening, and what people think.

So, Leader Cantor, we're very honored with your presence, and look forward very much to your comments.

Thank you.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Good afternoon. Russ, thank you very much for the introduction and for the invitation. It is an honor for me to be here at Brookings.

I want to congratulate the Brown Center on the third annual unveiling of the Education Choice Competitive Index Report.

And I also want to thank everybody here in this room for all you do to help fix our education system in America. And I know there are plenty of different perspectives that we bring to the table, but the fact that we're all here, driving towards the same goal of trying to help kids through fixing the education system, is saying something.

So, again, thanks to the Brown Center and Brookings for having us.

Let me begin with a very simple principle. We cannot be a great country without great schools. As this year's index notes, America is in the midst of an education revolution, with a shift towards more choice for families.

Now, as Russ says, I've spent some time over the last year and a half -- and then some -- in communities across the country, including my community of Richmond -- visiting schools, witnessing where school choice is firmly taking root. And I can tell you, it is making a difference, and improving the lives of children and their families.

Now we should first celebrate the dedication of the parents, certainly the teachers and the advocates in those communities who have worked tirelessly to make these things happen.

At the same time -- I know that we're all here, and that we can all agree that -- we must not rest until every school in every community adequately prepares every student for success in their pursuit, whether it be college, career, or life.

Now even if a small portion of our schools fail, we all fail -- whether we have children in school or not. All of us benefit if our schools improve, and we'll all pay the price if we fail the next generation.

But right now, school choice is under attack. And as Russ says, there's a long way to go, even with those communities at the top of this year's rankings.

And it's up to all of us -- and it's why we're here -- to work for and fight for the families who are going to suffer the consequences if school choice is taken away.

Now many of us have -- like I have -- been across the country, and seen for our very own eyes, with our own eyes, what the difference that school choice makes.

Last September, one of the visits that I made, I was in Philadelphia, at the Freire Public Charter School. Where I'm at, an incredible young man -- his name was Elijah, and he was a student at Freire, and he had a speech impediment.

Now a few years ago, Elijah's parents, James and Crystal Jones, felt that Elijah was not getting the personal attention or receiving the effective education that he needed at school.

And so they ended up at Freire. And I asked the parents, I said, "What made you choose Freire?" Well, unequivocally, both of them said, "First of all, Freire offered a safe place for Elijah to go every day." But then they said that they were

impressed with the administration and the faculty there, by their genuine commitment to try and afford Elijah the necessary tools for him to succeed -- even if that meant spending extra time with Elijah, due to his special needs.

So, because Elijah's parents had the freedom to choose, Elijah is thriving, and he is finally able -- because he's been given a chance to pursue his dreams.

Now to me, Elijah reminds us that behind each statistic is a child. It's a young boy or a young girl, young man or a young woman, whose generation will, in the not-too-distant-future, be responsible for the future of America.

Now we have a responsibility to them right now, a responsibility, yes, to our own children, if we have them, to our country's children, to our communities, and to our country's future -- to ensure that the kids of the next generation do graduate prepared for life and prepared to lead.

Now all parents and families should have a safe place for the children to learn. But the harsh reality is, as the index indicates, that millions of kids across the country are denied the chance that Elijah's family has. And that's unacceptable.

Now politics and policy are part of our every day here in Washington. Most times -- if not fortunate or unfortunate -- but safe and effective schools for all children isn't, and should not be, a political issue. It's not a partisan issue. It matters to every single one of us. And it especially matters to those living in poverty, who are desperate for a lifeline.

Now for many families living in poverty, that poverty spans generations. Parents and grandparents, they've all struggled to try and realize the American dream.

Now, to me, school choice is the surest way to break this vicious cycle of poverty. And we have got to act fast, before it's too late for too many.

The fact is, the federal government's approach to fixing our schools has been too slow, too sporadic, and too ineffective. And while we wait, we are losing generations of kids.

For far too long, the federal government's approach to fixing the system has been based on two principles: spend more money, and give more control to Washington. And since the mid-1960s, the federal government has spent billions of dollars to improve schools in low-income areas, with little to no effect.

Americans have a right to ask, "Why do our student test rates lag those of the other countries in the industrialized world? Why, in our large cities, do only half of public high school students graduate on time?" When the fact is, our biggest cities offer advantages that should make it easier, not harder, to have innovative and effective schools. Surrounded by universities, cultural industries, and diversity of industries, children in urban areas should be succeeding.

So, why are they so often, in so many cases, put in dangerous school environments, where they don't learn the math, science, language, and arts that we would hope, and they don't graduate?

The simple act of graduating high school not only dramatically increases the chance someone has a job, but it dramatically decreases the chance that that someone turns to crime. In America's large cities, unemployment and crime are staggering problems.

Introducing choice into these areas, especially, helps the kids -- and, just as importantly, helps those communities. The dropout rate in urban areas must be brought down to the national average, and school choice will help us achieve that goal.

Now working together, all of us should make teaching easier for

teachers, and we should make learning easier for students. We must embrace the teachers, the schools, and the communities that are succeeding, remove the roadblocks, and expand school choice. This is how we're going to begin to close the opportunity gap, and produce real results for all America's students -- especially those who are so desperately in need of our help.

On a recent trip to New Orleans -- as Russ pointed out, Orleans Parish is in the lead, as the index indicates -- I visited a Catholic school in downtown New Orleans, where I met a young student named Brian.

Now Brian never met his mom, because she's not around anymore. And the only way he's ever spoken to his father is through prison bars. And Brian's being raised by his grandma, who, when I was there, he had just found out that she'd been diagnosed with cancer.

So, on all accounts, one would say Brian doesn't have a lot at home. But what he does have when he comes to school is a lot more than most students in America. He's in a great school, surrounded by caring teachers, who go above and beyond, and are truly committed to his progress.

Brian is thriving. He told me he's got big plans for the future. And at 11 years old, he's aiming high. He says that he's got his heart set on going to college.

Now Brian's got the opportunity to attend this school because of Louisiana Scholarship Program, a program that was championed by Governor Jindal, who was here, Russ reminds me, last year -- a program that Governor Jindal sponsored that provides kids who live below the poverty line with the resources to attend a school of their family's choice.

Now when speaking here, at Brookings, Governor Jindal said, "To

oppose school choice is to oppose equal opportunity for poor and disadvantaged kids in America." I couldn't agree more.

But doesn't take his or my word for it; just look at the results. These scholarships have brought hope and opportunity to thousands of students just like Brian across the State of Louisiana -- and, as Russ mentioned, other states.

What Governor Jindal has done in Louisiana is a model that governors across the country can and should adopt.

Now, unfortunately, this program is under threat. Attorney General Holder and the Justice Department took Louisiana to court, claiming that its Education Opportunity Program impedes progress made through desegregation. In other words, the Attorney General is accusing the state of using this program to discriminate against minorities.

Now this kind of attack on an effective program that is designed to help everyone, providing scholarships to kids of every background, to me is political payback to those who oppose school choice. They see school choice as a threat -- and they're right. School choice is a threat to the status quo. School choice protects families and children, not bureaucracies.

School choice is about making sure that every student, like Elijah and like Brian, who have high aspirations and big dreams beyond the challenges in their daily lives -- ensures them that they can have the best teachers in the best possible school environment. Surely that is a goal that all of us can agree on.

After repeated calls to do so, the Attorney General withdrew his initial request to permanently shut down the program. However, he's still demanding that the federal government have a veto right over each child's scholarship award, and that

parents cannot be notified about their child's scholarship until it receives federal approval.

Now Governor Jindal has correctly identified this as an attempt to "red tape and regulate the program to death."

Now I challenge General Holder to visit Louisiana, and meet with the students and parents who participate in this education scholarship program. I challenge General Holder to look these families in the eye, as I have -- to go and talk with Brian and his grandma, to listen to how the scholarship has improved their lives and hope for the future. And then perhaps he can try and explain to them how what he's trying to do is going to help them.

Now, unfortunately, the attacks on school choice and its successful programs are not limited to Louisiana. Over the last decade, in New York City, the Bloomberg administration made it easier for charter schools to collocate with other traditional public schools in the same building. And I know their place on the list in the index is indicative of some of those efforts.

Now it may not sound like that's revolutionary change -- collocating with public schools -- but what it meant for those charter schools was real, meaningful improvement for families in the city, because their real estate costs were defrayed. And the number of charter schools grew from 17 to 183 charter schools in 12 years.

But now it is being reported that that city's new mayor, Bill de Blasio, is considering a moratorium on charter school collocations, and may even go so far as charging them additional rent.

Now this move has the potential to devastate the growth of education opportunity in such a competitive real estate market like New York City.

Just think -- how many families are going to be harmed? How many

families are going to have their choice taken away if Mayor de Blasio pursues these policies? Mayor de Blasio should abandon this idea, and should allow, instead, New York City's charter schools to flourish.

You see, on issues like this, the House of Representatives and our committees will remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure that no one from the government stands in the schoolhouse door between any child and a good education.

Right here in our nation's capital, there is huge progress in school choice -- again, as the index notes. But there's also an assault that is going on at the same time.

Since it was created in 2004 with bipartisan support, the D.C. Opportunities Scholarship Program has received more than 11,000 applications, and with over 1,600 students receiving aid to attend a school of their choice in the past year alone.

Now recent studies showed that charter school students here in Washington gained the equivalent of an extra 72 days in reading and 101 days in math instruction over the course of a year, compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools here. What an incredible achievement.

Yet, despite the program's success and popularity, President Obama has refused to include funding for it in his annual budget. Now why? The President should fund the D.C. Opportunities Scholarship Program in his upcoming budget. Plain and simple, the program works.

No matter what party or what philosophy we adhere to or come from, we should all leave no doubt that the D.C. Opportunities Scholarship will receive the funding and support that it deserves.

Now the House, as Russ has indicated, has been very active and has

been leading on school choice. In July, we did pass the Student Success Act. Now this bill was built around the idea that Chairman Kline and our education committee have been working on. And that is that we should learn from one another's successes. We should build on improvements that are delivering the real results for children and the schools that they attend.

Now this act will help expand education opportunity by providing incentives for states to replicate high-quality charter schools. The bill requires that school systems provide parents access to information about the performance of their local schools. Parents can then actually hold schools accountable for the quality of education that their children receive.

The Student Success Act also includes an amendment that Russ talked about, that I authored, that, for the first time, does allow federal funds to follow Title I kids -- for the first time. And this ensures that the priority remains what is best for those children and their families, no one else's priorities.

With the passage of the bill, I believe the House took an important step toward advancing education opportunity for all students in America. And I urge the Senate to begin consideration today of that House-passed bill.

Now more than 2 million students across America are now taking advantage of public charter schools. Over the past five years, student enrollment in these charter schools has grown by 80 percent. And another 225,000 families used tax credit scholarships or vouchers to attend private schools.

School choice programs are experiencing this kind of expansion for one very simple reason: They work. They deliver real and measureable results.

So, it is my personal goal that, in 10 years, every child in America will

have education opportunity through school choice, no matter where they live.

Now progress isn't easy. We all know that -- in this town, especially. But nothing truly important is ever very easy. So, improving our schools, fixing our education system, we all know is not going to happen overnight, but we do have a responsibility to make it a priority, and work at it each and every day.

And I know that, thanks to Brookings, and the Brown Center, Russ and all your work, and all the work and goodwill of the folks in this room, as well as the millions of dedicated parents and families across this country, that we really are well on our way. So, thank you very much for having me.

MR. WHITEHURST: Well, thank you for very interesting remarks. Some of our guests here are unwilling to say anything controversial. I'm glad that you're not typical in that respect.

An issue that you touched on, I want to delve into a little further, if I may, with you -- and that is, the No Child Left Behind Act -- the current law governing elementary and secondary education -- was passed into law in 2001. Here we are, in 2014, with the reauthorization. The Student Success Act was passed on a party line vote in the House.

What do you see as the prospects for some kind of bipartisan agreement on the nation's education law? And where is education choice in there?

This used to be distinctly nonpartisan. So, when we released the index in the first year, I was getting calls from Democratic staffers on the Hill, saying, "This is something my boss might be able to get behind."

With the deBlasio victory in New York, attack on public charter schools, it seems that the calculus is changing a little bit.

So, your reflections on the politics of education reform, particularly on the Hill, would be appreciated.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Sure. Well, first of all, I think that the Senate has got to go and take up a reauthorization of the Secondary Education Act. I mean, that is number one.

And just as so many other things in this town -- but, certainly, there are some deep-rooted differences on secondary education policy. It doesn't mean that the Senate shouldn't act, and then we can go ahead and begin the process of trying to understand where there is commonality, and focus on the things we can agree on.

And, Russ, as you say, charter schools is something that I believe has bipartisan support. Mayor de Blasio aside, I do think that there certainly are plenty of folks on both sides of the aisle that agree school choice -- and public charter schools is one.

I know that, several months ago, Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, came down to Richmond, where I'm from, and we held a roundtable. It was on higher education, but we had a discussion about charter schools, and what we could do, perhaps, to work together on those.

So, again, not unlike so many of the other issues here, I think the focus should be on trying to see where we can come together. There are so many easy opportunities to differ. Let's take on the project of seeing where we can come together in common.

And, really, as I just said, it is on behalf of those kids -- like Elijah, and like Brian, and the nearly dozen more that I met around the country -- that have really experienced a change in their life trajectory because of school choice.

Thank you.

MR. WHITEHURST: I'd like to give those of you in the audience the opportunity to ask some questions. The rules here are that I call on you, you tell us who you are, you ask your question briefly, and give us a chance to respond.

So, please raise your hand if you'd like to ask a question. I'll call on the gentleman next to the wall here. If you'll give us a chance to get a microphone to you, I would be very appreciative.

MR. PEELER: I thought you were going to say I was on the far right.

But the name's George Peeler. I cofounded the Washington Scholarship Fund, which was the precursor of the Opportunity Scholarship.

I'd like to ask the Leader -- in one of his remarks about the status of the D.C. Scholarships -- what the leadership is doing to ensure in the current omnibus negotiation that there's increased and stable funding for the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships -- and, hopefully, the same thing over the next two-year budget cycle?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: I would venture to say that your hope is as mine is -- that we can maintain the level of funding. I've seen, on the ground, in private schools here in the district, the benefit of that is conferred on individuals in this city, families who are impoverished, and have seen the lifeline that that program offers.

So, we have it, certainly, as a priority, and I'm hopeful that next week, when we vote on the package of spending in domestic priorities, that that'll be one of them.

MR. PEELER: So, it's a must-do, I think.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: For me.

MR. PEELER: All right. Thanks.

MR. WHITEHURST: I would add to Leader Cantor's remarks on the program working that it's also far less expensive on a per-pupil basis than a regular school education in D.C.

Next question?

All right -- gentleman just to your right, Sarah.

MR. CANN: Thank you. I'm Stephen Cann. I'm retired from the U.S. Council for International Business -- and, prior to that, the Treasury Department.

For either of you gentlemen -- I didn't hear the position -- do the teachers unions have a position on school choice? And if so, what is their position?

MR. WHITEHURST: I would say the teachers unions -- I mean, there's not just one teachers union, of course. And the teachers unions are on a per-state basis. There are teachers unions that have been more open to public school choice in the form of charters -- and generally hostile to choice in the form of vouchers that allow students to attend private schools.

But the support of charter schools has been tepid at best, and that's because most charter schools, the teachers are not unionized in those schools. I mean, if you're a teachers union, why would you want to encourage the growth of schools in which you don't have members?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: And I would add, as well -- I'm from Virginia, and those of us from Virginia in here know, we don't have teachers unions. We don't have public employee unions in Virginia, and yet we have one of the most challenged charter school laws in the country, I would say. If I'm correct, maybe four or five charter schools in the whole state.

I visited the largest one in Richmond, and it is doing phenomenal for the

kids that have that opportunity to choose that school -- overwhelmingly minority in population.

And so it's, I think, more of a question of those who are just supporting the status quo -- because, again, in a state that doesn't have teachers unions, per se, there's a lot of opposition at some point for charter schools.

And that's the kind of thing, I think, that all of us can work together, to try and change that perception. Charter schools is something that really is, to me, the first step towards allowing people to begin to feel comfortable that competition and choice frankly could be a good thing for people and for kids.

And it's not just getting kids out of failing schools. Maybe there's a good school that a parent, perhaps, feel that doesn't best-suit their child's needs, and there's across town or down the street that could better do so.

MR. WHITEHURST: Here? Again, please give us a chance to get the microphone to you. Thank you.

MS. SEVERNS: Hi -- Maggie Severns, *Politico*. Thank you for being here.

I was interested in your remarks about the House stopping Mayor de Blasio from blocking school choice in New York. I'm curious what exactly you would see the House doing in that role, and how you'd reconcile that with states' rights?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: I don't think that was a correct reflection of my language. I said, "We're going to remain vigilant at attempts to try and thwart the growth in public school choice and in education choice."

And, you know, Mayor de Blasio's announced policies -- or those that have been reported -- to me, are in conflict with the federal programs that are designed to

help facilitate the growth in successful school choice. There are monies, there are programs designed specifically for that.

And so if you have a district like New York -- obviously, I think, the largest district in the country -- and, all of a sudden, the policy of the city is, no more growth in charter schools; in fact, we're going to be detrimental to that growth -- to me, that's in direct conflict to federal programs that exist.

And so in my opinion, it's always been that the federal government -- in terms of education, one of the roles is, disseminate information. Like I said, where is the success, and how can we build and share in that success?

And so I would hope that -- I know that our committee, under John Kline's leadership, is interested in helping to facilitate more education options that will allow for more success in the country.

And so that's why I'm so strong in feeling that I believe that Mayor de Blasio's reported policies are going to hurt kids and their families, and they ought not go into effect.

MR. WHITEHURST: Here -- Mitzi.

MS. WERTHEIM: I'm Mitzi Wertheim, with the Naval Postgraduate School.

I was listening to the story on healthcare that was on *the Press Club* this afternoon at 1:00. And one of the things that was so interesting about that was, the whole subject was on collaboration.

And I wonder what kind of collaboration exists in the K-12 of learning from other schools or other cities. How do you promote that?

And I guess the other question I have is, why are people who are not in

unions opposing this?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Well, first of all, Mitzi, collaboration, to me, comes from the ability to exchange ideas and information. And it's one of the reasons why I have made it a priority for me to go and see for myself the difference that education choice can make in the lives of so many students, and I think most of the cities are on the top list there, I've been to, to see what's going on.

And, you know, when you're at a school, it's not about who's Republican, who's Democrat, who's liberal, who's conservative; it's about trying to do what's best for those kids.

And that's why I think education, in so many ways, represents the answer to not only the kids' futures, but the future of those communities, the future competitiveness of our country, and, you know, ultimately, as indicated before, the future success in trying to lift folks out of poverty.

This is it. Education reform and success in education will ultimately allow someone to escape, and lift themselves out of poverty. So, if there's anything that we should be able to collaborate around, it is that.

And so your question about, "Well, why would there be opposition if there weren't unions?" I made the point, because I think it has changed. It has changed, and people who are protective of the status quo are maybe going to see it as a threat.

But I have seen enough examples across the country where I know that, although change can be scary, it makes a real difference for families and their kids -- such a difference that we all would take the risk, and go ahead and explore that change collaboratively.

MS. WERTHEIM: How do you make that happen?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Well, I mean, we are trying to help facilitate that on a bipartisan basis.

Again, I mentioned that Secretary Duncan has said and has demonstrated he's willing to work across the aisle, coming down to Richmond, to join me in a roundtable.

And we're going to continue to try and do those things. I know that Chairman Kline has continued to say, "Please, work with us." You know, we've got to go and do a better job. And I'm hopeful this year, in 2014, of working together. And it's going to take the discipline to say, "You know what? We're going to disagree on some of these very big issues, but, certainly, we can agree on helping kids."

And that's what I think the collaboration should be about and can be about.

MR. WHITEHURST: Let me add that there's another form that generates the same outcome as collaboration -- that is competition.

So, you see, for example, Houston Independent School District putting in place in its lower-performing schools a management routine that looks very much like what successful charter schools are doing.

So, the competition from successful charters has led them to change their regular schools in a way that replicates what seem to be successful practices.

Here.

MR. PALMER: Jonathan Palmer, Medill News Service.

Earlier, you talked about pulling money out of unpopular schools in districts that have regulation for school choice. And I was wondering what pulling money out of unpopular schools does for the children that are left in those schools, when some

parents don't want to send their kids to those particular schools, and how having to close those schools and move those kids to more schools -- like, how that works out.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Again -- what was the question? I don't think I said "pulling monies out of schools."

MR. WHITEHURST: I said that.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Oh, you said that -- okay.

MR. PALMER: That's why I was asking a question about that particularly, when it comes to schools.

MR. WHITEHURST: Since I said it, we won't leave Leader Cantor to explain.

I mean, on a per-pupil basis, there's no loss. But if parents, through choice, are fleeing schools, and you let the per-pupil expenditure in the unpopular schools double because they halve the number of kids there, but they continue to see the same appropriation, then it's the kids in the popular schools who are losing, because they're not getting their fair share of the district's budget.

So, hold harmless allows the schools that are losing kids to be held harmless, but it's not harmless to the families who are moving.

MR. PALMER: All right. Thank you.

MR. WHITEHURST: Here.

MR. CORNEOS: Stephen Corneos, Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (inaudible) -- just one quick question.

Pertaining to the -- you alluded to this, on federal legislation regarding regulation of education. And I wanted to ask about the prospect of passing ESEA or the IES-enabling statute -- to both of you -- the prospect of passing some of this legislation in

the coming year.

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Well, again, I think that, you know, there needs to be a two-way street. There needs to be action on the part of both houses. And the first thing that's got to happen is, the Senate has to act.

And, again, I know a lot of differences are going to be in that action, versus the action in the House. But we've got to get the process started.

So, half of it is started with the House passage. Now we're waiting. I do think that it's important that that occur, and it's an election year. I think that's something for everyone to rally around. An election year should be good education policy, education reform.

MR. WHITEHURST: The Education Science Act reauthorization was very close to bipartisan agreement in the House, and I think it fell apart over trivial matters. And the fact that there was bipartisan agreement on all matters of substance, I think, should be very encouraging to those of us who care about the future of that law.

Gentleman here -- yes.

MR. GUERRA: I'm Michael Guerra, Board Member of the American Center for School Choice and Past President of the National Catholic Education Association.

A question for the Leader -- but, first, a tribute to Brookings. Thinking about your history on this issue, going back a little over 20 years, when Terry Moe and John Chubb, who had a Brookings affiliation, published *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, arguing, essentially, that choice is a panacea; more recently, when Diane Ravitch, who had an affiliation with Brookings, said that choice is a bomb that's being planted to blow up education; and now this report that says choice is a good thing but not

-- so that progress, I think, is reasonable when it comes to the truth.

For the Leader -- you used two examples, as I recall -- one from a charter school in Philadelphia, and one from a Catholic school in Louisiana.

Do you see issues of principle and politics with the inclusion of faith-based schools in the choice movement?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: Certainly of politics. I mean, I do think that if you saw the Title I amendment that we put onto the Student Success Act, it was limited public charter schools -- that Title I monies could only follow a kid to a public charter school.

I would have preferred it to have applied to whatever the family felt was best for its child, whether it was a faith-based school, or whether it was a public charter school.

You know, in terms of policy and principle, I've seen it work in New Orleans. And, you know, I saw it. When I was at the school, I saw State Representatives there, grading progress. And because these schools -- as you know, the diocese there agrees to accept the scholarship amount as full tuition -- and are then held to account by the program.

So, I think it can work. I've seen it work. Certainly, there's politics in the way, because I do know that there's much opposition to those of us who want to make sure that it's a full choice, and not just a public school choice -- although, listen -- I am for school choice. So, I'm for, as in many other things, let's work together, towards incremental progress, and we can end up getting to where we want to go.

MR. WHITEHURST: Gentleman on the row, on the outside here, on the aisle. Thank you.

This is the last question, so make it a good one.

MR. LAUGHNER: Hi. I'm John Laughner, Magnet Schools of America.

I just wanted to get your opinion about magnet schools. They're the largest form of public school choice. And in the era of partisan gridlock, do you think that possibly embracing the magnet approach may be a good way to bridge the divide between the two parties, considering magnet schools generally respect the right of teachers to unionize? As well, they stay under the purview of a school district, as far as administration. They are the largest form of public school choice, and they do give parents the right to choose, and they encourage competition.

So, do you feel that maybe, possibly increasing funding to magnet schools through federal programs and embracing that approach may be a good way to sort of move forward?

CONGRESSMAN CANTOR: The experience I have, certainly, at home, in the greater Richmond area, is, we have terrific magnet schools. And I know there's a magnet school, Maggie Walker, that is very, very competitive for the public school students in the area to apply to and to be accepted. Certainly, it works.

I would say this -- I mean, I'm a supporter of that. But there is not a one-size-fits-all. We certainly should be about sharing success stories. And, again, that's what Chairman Kline is about, in the Student Success Act. He's building on the successes. Let's replicate those. Let's provide incentives for that.

But I don't think that there is going to be a one-size-fits-all. You know, that's what's broken right now, is the one-size-fits-all, and the fact that so many kids are being left out of the quality education.

You look at -- you know, there's been so many that go to a magnet

school, all right? Still, comparatively speaking, there's been so many that can access a good public charter school, all right?

So, I think we need to work to provide for the platform, if you will, for education choice nationwide, and help provide incentive for what works.

MR. WHITEHURST: Thank you very much, Leader Cantor, for being with us today, and for your interesting, provocative, and encouraging remarks.

Thank you very much.

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