

THE Skanner

Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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Opinion

School Choice Not the Right Choice for All Students

When the best educators in America traveled to Washington, D.C. for a series of events celebrating innovation in the classroom and to share best practices in K-12 education, they let officials at the Department of Education and the White House know exactly how they felt about the Trump Administration's current push for school choice programs.

According to edchoice.org, school choice programs allow, "public education funds to follow students to the schools or services that best fit their needs—whether that's to a public school, private school, charter school, home school."

In April 2018, the Department of Education (ED) hosted the "Honoring Martin Luther King Jr.'s Drum Major Legacy: Innovative Pathways to Success" celebration; the event was sponsored by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans in collaboration with the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The Education Department's MLK Legacy event honored individuals who perform extraordinary acts of service in their communities, specifically those individuals



Dr. Elizabeth Primas

Program Manager, NNPA

who support high-quality education for children of color. Many of the awardees work with parents or community groups that provide primary care for children; some even provide educational support services outside of the tradi-

“Every child should be entitled to high-quality education in the United States of America

tional public school model.

School choice became a hot topic during the event, as several attendees were visibly disgruntled at the mention of the controversial approach.

The Trump Administration has proposed to decrease funding to authorized in-

vestments for public schools while increasing funding opportunities for school choice programs and private school vouchers. Ninety percent of children in America attend public schools. Increased funding to school choice programs, while reducing funding to public schools is a strategy that leaves behind our most vulnerable students.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has repeatedly said that she's committed to uphold the intentions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the education law signed by President Barack Obama. However, the prioritization of school choice programs in the proposed FY2019 budget contradicts one of the original intentions of the law: to promote equity and increase access to high-quality education for all students. Furthermore, prioritization of school choice isolates homeless children, migrant children, youth in foster care and children from military families. In fact, ESSA requires that school districts report student outcomes for these groups for the very first time.

The 2018 Teacher of the Year awardees echoed similar concerns during their annual White House visit in April.

The top teachers in the country reported that they did not approve of funding private schools at the expense of their most vulnerable, at-risk students.

Every child should be entitled to high-quality education in the United States of America. Every neighborhood school should be equipped to provide high-quality courses and curriculum. Every student should have highly-qualified teachers and a menu of extra-curricular activities to choose from. Until the administration prioritizes the equitable improvement of all schools, their verbal commitment to uphold the original intent of ESSA is just another "alternative fact."

Learn more about the Every Student Succeeds Act at nnpa.org/essa.

Dr. Elizabeth Primas was the 2000 Teacher of the Year award recipient for Washington, D.C.

Dr. Elizabeth Primas is an educator, who spent more than 40 years working towards improving education for children of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds. Dr. Primas is the program manager for the NNPA's Every Student Succeeds Act Public Awareness Campaign. Follow Dr. Primas on Twitter @ElizabethPrima3.

Protecting Our Community During National Foster Care Month

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, our community was under a full-fledged attack. Crack was in our streets, it was in our schools, it was in our parks, it was in our playgrounds, and for some, it was in our homes. The epidemic wasn't just affecting one part of the community; this impacted the entire community, leaving sons without fathers, daughters without mothers, and parents, ultimately, alone.

But the carnage didn't stop there. Policies enacted during the crack epidemic exacerbated the destruction. Children in South Los Angeles were ripped away from their parents and shipped off into the child welfare system, some to never see their parents, or their families, again. It was at the height of the crack epidemic when the number of kids in foster care exploded and the percentage of Black youth in the system skyrocketed.

Now, the country, not just our community, faces a new epidemic. Our child welfare system is already becoming increasingly populated due to the consequences of the opioid epidemic. The current



Rep. Karen Bass

Senator (D-Calif.)

crisis is starting to devastate families and our already over-worked and under-resourced child welfare system. This time, we must apply the lessons learned from the

“No one knows more about the pitfalls of our nation's child welfare system than those who grew up in it.

crack epidemic: if you want successful policy, you must include the affected communities in the formulation of new policy.

We cannot afford to turn our backs on those impacted again.

At the end of this month, the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth will host its 7th annual Foster Youth Shadow Day, a program that brings foster youth from all over the country to meet and shadow the very Members of Congress who represent them in Washington, D.C.

No one knows more about the pitfalls of our nation's child welfare system than those who grew up in it. These young people are travelling thousands of miles to come to D.C. to share their stories—both their challenges with abuse, trafficking, overmedication, or homelessness—as well as their successes with mentorship, adoption, family reunification, community activism and independent living.

The result of these visits is a better understanding of how to improve the child welfare system and fight against this epidemic. The FY 2018 omnibus bill that was passed earlier this year had the single biggest increase in investment in child welfare funding history along with a large investment in funds to combat the opioid crisis. Despite this progress, there will always

be more work to be done and this month, I look forward to continuing this fight. National Foster Care Month is a month to honor the successes and challenges of the more than 400,000 foster youth across the country and to acknowledge the tireless efforts of those who work to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system.

Making sure that all children have a permanent and loving home is not a Democrat or Republican issue – it should be an American priority. Our society is judged on how we treat the most vulnerable amongst us. We must invest in life improving foster care services, praise foster families, caregivers, and relatives for their selflessness to others, and continue to provide a hand up so that foster youth can realize their full potential.

Congresswoman Karen Bass represents California's 37th Congressional District. She is the 2nd Vice Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and the co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth. Follow her on Twitter at @Rep-KarenBass.