



119th Ways and Means Member Day Hearing – Rep. Burgess Owens Remarks

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to advocate for legislation shared between this committee and the Committee on Education and the Workforce, on which I serve as Vice-Chair.

Here shortly I will be introducing the Educational Choice for Children Act, or ECCA, alongside my friend, Adrian Smith – a senior member of this committee and tireless advocate for school choice.

The ECCA – passed through committee last September – I first introduced in the 117th Congress with our late colleague and beloved friend Jackie Walorski. Jackie was a joyful champion of policies to ensure every parent and child had the resources and education they need to succeed, and this bill is a fitting tribute to her legacy.

Jackie, like myself, was raised with the strong belief that education and hard work have the power to create upward socio-economic mobility. This was true for my own father, a WWII veteran and HBCU professor, who leveraged education to ensure our family thrived in the middle-class.

By offering parents and students more educational options, we create more and better opportunities that empower generations to make their American Dream a reality. This was true for me, growing up in the bigoted segregated south and can be so for so many children today trapped in a cycle of forgotten dreams and lost hope.

Our bill is based on wildly popular and incredibly successful state programs. Like the *Children First Education Fund* in my home state of Utah, these programs are designed to address any concerns of direct government funding of scholarships.

Because the ECCA provides a “refundable” tax credit to support scholarship, it diverts no existing funding away from our public schools. Any fear-mongering saying otherwise is a slapdash effort to keep choice and money out of the hands of parents. The ECCA can be compared to other existing tax programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and the New Markets Tax Credit, which benefit from robust bipartisan support.

To ensure that the government does not participate in awarding scholarships for attendance at religious schools, ECCA tax credits and scholarships are administered through independent Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). These SGOs both allocate non-refundable credits to donors and select those families who receive scholarships, guaranteeing that students in all parts of the country – *not just cities and suburbs* – can participate. SGOs may also offer assistance with supplemental educational assistance and supplies for families in need – not solely school tuition.

This model has already proven to be both sustainable and successful for the recipients of children scholarship funds across the country:

In Philadelphia – 98 percent of eighth graders graduate high school on time and 70 percent enroll in some form of post-secondary education within one year of graduating high school.



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In New York City – 97 percent graduated high school on time in 2024, compared to the most recent average NYC public school graduation rate of 83.7 percent.

In Baltimore – a 97 percent graduation rate and 84 percent enroll in college.

In San Francisco – a 98 percent high school graduation rate and 53 percent college graduation rate, compared with 11 percent for low-income students nationally.

“Ignorant and Free, can never be” harkens to the vision and foresight of our founders who considered education and the pursuit of knowledge as foundational to a free and open society. The Constitution, in no uncertain terms, enshrines the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness as the vision of a Heavenly Father that puts value on every child and every life.... Regardless of race, creed, color or zip code.

Unfortunately, many children across the country, particularly Black and Brown children, lack basic reading and writing skills, are discouraged from fostering pride in their country, and are taught to embrace victimhood as a virtue while perceiving hard work and merit as vices. This combination of challenges makes the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness unattainable.

Adrian Smith and I are fighting today for the Heart and Soul of our nation. This committee cannot accept that the intellectual & educational failure of our own children is normal.

This legislation assures a WIN/WIN/WIN/WIN. A **Win** for the Parent to see their child reach their potential, a **WIN** for the educational community to allow competition and meritocracy, a **WIN** for caring citizen donors seeking to reduce their tax burden, and a **WIN** for our nation’s most *precious product...our children* .. to become happy, productive citizens of their community and country.

I look forward to continue working with my colleagues here today to *again* pass this bill through the Ways and Means Committee. Outside of this room and to the rest of my colleagues, I will not be outworked as a relentless and passionate advocate for what I know to be a transformative innovation in school choice, empowering parents across the country with new tools to maximize opportunity for their kids.

I urge this Committee to expeditiously consider and pass the Educational Choice for Children Act – our children desperately need it. Thank you and I yield back.