

May 13, 2009
Latasha Bennett
1147 Stevens Rd. S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020

United States Senate
Committee On
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Washington, DC 20510-6250

Re: "The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program".

Dear Senate Committee:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, and fellow citizens. Thank you for inviting me to discuss how the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided a better opportunity for my child. My name is Latasha Bennett; I am a 37 year old single mother of 2 very intelligent children. My son Nico Thomas is 8 years old and is in the 2nd grade at Naylor Rd. Private School. He is able to attend through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program and he is excelling.

My annual income is approximately \$12,200. Therefore I fit the criteria for the low-income guidelines for the program. I am currently unemployed due to a disability that prevents me from working for long periods of time. I worked from the age of 14 up until I became disabled initially in 2000, I then waited several years thinking that I would be able to return to work in 2006, unfortunately that employment venture did not last long. I was supervising id records for the police department. I love working and performing office and Supervisor duties, and I can't wait to go back to work as soon as I'm able.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program has been a true blessing for me as well as Nico. He loves his school, his teacher, his friends, and the staff. Nico is part of the reading and debate club and now wants to be a doctor. His class consists of only 12 students therefore it is more hands on and the children are given more attention. They learn 2xs better than the large class he would experience at the DC public school assigned to my neighborhood Birney Elementary School. It would devastate my child if he were to have to leave Naylor Rd due to the fact that the OSP is on the chopping block and I can't afford to send him there on my own.

I already lost a nephew to the D.C. schools. You may remember the story Feb.2, 2004 of James Richardson 17 year old, student at Ballou a star football player, who was shot inside the school. That was my nephew. His assigned neighborhood school was unsafe and had low expectations for the students. I wonder if he would be sitting here today as a success story, if a scholarship had been available for him to attend a private school. The scholarship provides my child an opportunity to be in a quality educational environment and I know he will be a productive citizen in the future. I will not lose my babies when they are so bright and willing to learn.

My daughter Nia Thomas is 4 years old. I receive a DHS voucher from the District of Columbia, which I also qualify for because of my income so that she can attend pre-school. I fought and advocated for her to be able to attend Naylor Road's Pre-K program at the Annex with the DHS voucher. Naylor Rd. School applied to participate in the program in July but they weren't approved until December. She started at the school the very next day. This was the best thing that has ever happened for Nia – she can write her name, she knows all her letters – she is so smart. I'm grateful that D.C. has the voucher for Pre-K so that she can learn and be ready for Kindergarten.

I applied for Nia to get a D.C. Opportunity Scholarship so that she could attend Naylor Rd. for the 09-10 school year. I was initially told that she was eligible for a scholarship, I was so elated. Then along came a retraction letter, and I was devastated and angry. I want Nia to have the same opportunity to excel as well as her older brother. Nia is so looking forward to going to Naylor Rd. with her brother that she continues to ask me "Mom when do I go to school with my brother"? I use to answer her and tell her very soon, now I don't know what to tell her. My children really need this program to continue, without it I truly don't have a clue as to where I will send them to school. My assigned neighborhood school is not an acceptable place, and options are so limited at this late date.

I would like to ask Mr. Secretary Arne Duncan how is it that my child should not be given the same opportunity as his children to get the best education possible. If Congress gave enough money, why is she being denied the opportunity to attend a great school, the same school as her brother? I have not told her that she is not going to Naylor rd. school, because I am pleading to the Committee, Mr. Duncan, to Mayor Fenty and our President OBAMA to get involved. The children are our future. I want to personally thank the 14 Senators that wrote Secretary Duncan asking him to reconsider his decision to end this most needed program. I also thank President OBAMA for extending the program for current students – but it's not enough. What am I to do now with my daughter who is entering Kindergarten and wants to attend the same school as her brother? Why is Nia not as important as the other children – doesn't she deserve the same opportunity to get an excellent education as her brother, a lot of Senators, Mayors and your beautiful daughters have? Please hear my plea about the severity of this matter to me and a lot of parents who are going through the same stress and anxiety of not knowing what is going to happen to our children's hopes and dreams for a better future and education.

I attended the rally last week in Freedom Plaza, and helped deliver a petition with over 7,400 D.C. residents that agree with me – the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should continue as an option. But that's just the beginning, I'm going to continue to ask everyone to get involved in this very important issue and assure that this program does not end. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program should be extended so that not only my children, but also the children of my friends and relatives, should have the opportunity to get the same type of education as your children are receiving.

Education is the #1 priority in my household and by allotting federal funding towards this program that is a success, shows great improvement on the part of our Government decision-making. It is evident that this program is working because the statistics show that the students have higher test scores. This program shows that low-income children can excel when given the opportunity. It gives parents such as myself **HOPE** for our future.

My children's future depends on this opportunity. They have bright goals for their future so please allow them to come true by continuing this program. Remember **our children are our future** and without the proper education what type of future will we have? So please recommit to this outstanding program, I thank you and so do Nico and Nia in advance, because we know that all of you know that education is key to their success. We believe you will make the right decision.

Thank You,

Latasha Bennett
Concerned Parent

Congressional Hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

Before the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Written Statement for Tiffany Dunston

May 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for having a hearing on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. It is a tremendous honor that you invited me to speak with you about my experiences with the D.C. OSP. Being selected for a Scholarship changed my life and I hope to be the first college graduate in my family.

My family was overjoyed when I was selected to receive a DC Opportunity Scholarship before entering my freshman year of high school. I had dreamt of going to Archbishop Carroll high school but that was not possible. I lived with my grandmother who is disabled and she could not afford to send me to the school of my dreams. She applied for the scholarship because she wanted the best education for me.

Receiving a scholarship was a blessing for my family and put me on the path to success. I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of poverty and crime. And there were such low expectations for kids in my neighborhood schools. I would watch kids hanging out on the streets and not going to school. My family also experienced our own tragedy. My motivation to get the best education possible was my cousin James who was shot and killed at 17. James was planning to attend college and play basketball. My cousin was going to be the first college graduate in my family, but he died before he was given that opportunity. Now I'm trying to step in his shoes and finish what he started. I am always thinking of what he could have done. To my family and to myself, I am a representation of what he could have done for my family and community. Through the DC OSP, I was afforded the opportunity to do just that. With the help of the scholarship my dream was realized. I had a say, a choice, in my education.

Now when I look back on my high school years I can definitely say that "I came a long way." This personal journey was made possible by my education at Archbishop Carroll. The environment at Carroll is so different from public schools in DC. From the activities and curriculum to the way we are expected to treat our peers and our studies, I was constantly pushed to be a better person and a better student. At a public school, there are constant distractions from school

work. With the scholarship, I was able to attend a school that provided a caring environment as well as a school where one-on-one relationships with teachers were possible. Additionally, Archbishop Carroll gives you a moral education: what is right, and what not to do. The rigorous environment provided by Archbishop Carroll helped me to become the hardworking individual I am today.

I just finished my freshman year at Syracuse University, where I received almost a full scholarship. I'm excited to go back for my sophomore year, and plan on majoring in biochemistry and minoring in French. I do look at myself as a DC success story, but I am not the only one who has seen such achievement. I have friends who are in the same place as I am. They were able to have a scholarship and they're so happy with their experiences and how their future now looks.

I was lucky enough to receive the Opportunity Scholarship for all four years of high school. Had my scholarship been terminated halfway through, I would not have been able to graduate from Archbishop Carroll at the top of my class. I am so grateful for this opportunity – and sad that the other families won't have the same opportunity for their children if this program is taken away.

While I was able to come a long way, I see the challenges that kids in DC still face. I am determined to be a part of this fight to continue this scholarship for other students. I have been very blessed and would like others to have this same opportunity. I am determined to build a better life for myself and through this Opportunity Scholarship I am on that path. I want others in my community to have that chance as well.

You have the ability to give other D.C. children the opportunity I had. My education gave me the chance at a successful future. Please don't end a program that worked for me and is benefiting tons of other children. Three years from now I'll be walking across a stage receiving my college diploma. Without the OSP, none of this would have been possible

Testimony of Ronald Holassie
United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
May 13, 2009

TO: Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

My name is Ronald Holassie. I am currently Deputy Youth Mayor for Legislative Affairs for the District of Columbia. I am excelling and soaring to success. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has changed my life and has made me the successful young man standing before you now. I credit this program greatly for my success.

But it all started in 6th grade. My mother was extremely concerned with my education. I was coming home almost every night with no homework and with poor grades. She was on the verge of sending me to her home country of Trinidad to go to school. Right around that time she found out about the Opportunity Scholarship Program, she applied and I was selected to receive the scholarship. My mother was very excited when she found out I was selected for the program. She felt that I now had a chance to receive a quality education and have a bright future. The program gave me a chance to change my life and be in a different high quality-learning environment. The program paid for my uniform and school tuition. My mother was so thankful because as a single parent she could not afford to pay for a private school.

Soon came the first day of school at a private school. I was quite nervous and didn't know what to expect. My first year was so much of a transition, having so many new expectations and requirements. I was forced to change and evolve. The next two years in the program I found myself changing so much. My study habits increased, I had better grades, I began to know my high expectations academically and I began to soar to success.

Then came my first year of high school at Archbishop Carroll. I made honor roll in the 1st quarter. There were so many activities and clubs for me to participate in. I had a proper learning environment, a high quality education, and a brighter future ahead of me. I am about to go on to the 11th grade, which I now have found out would be my last year, unless the Opportunity Scholarship Program is re-authorized. Right before 12th grade, my road to a brighter future of success would be shut down. I am struck that someone would take away my chance and others chances of having a brighter future of success. Everything I have worked for in my high school years would be lost. My road to a brighter future would be stalled. This could cause me to go backward. You should never have to go back or look back when you are moving forward in a positive direction. My future of success would become a lost dream. I say this and mean this. No one should take away my future and dreams of becoming a successful young man. No one should take that away from me and the other 1,700 children in this program. We have been on a long road and have come so far and been through so much to get to where we are today.

One of my greatest passions is music, which was inspired by this program. I started writing lyrics while I was in this program as my reading and writing level in public school was so far behind that it became difficult for me to write lyrics successfully. The high quality education with the advanced level of reading and writing helped me advance my skills as a lyricist. I had music class in private school that taught me more and went into depth. I then discovered my voice and began singing. I then became better and began to evolve as a singer. Currently I have 6 albums of songs and I have recorded, written and co-produced my songs. I'm now working in the studio recording my promo. This has been my dream, which I am now achieving because of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

I will again say, the Opportunity Scholarship Program must continue. There is no if, and, or but about it. Just as I have evolved and changed so much as a person, other Opportunity Scholarship Program recipients are doing so as well. My little brother, Richard, is also a recipient of the OSP. He is in 3rd grade at Preparatory School of DC and is doing really well. It is not only about me and Richard and the 1,700 current recipients. I want other children to have the same opportunity of school choice as we have had. I want them to evolve and succeed and have a brighter future. We are the future of DC, of the United States of America, and of the World. This program is so powerful and magnificent as it can change an individual and make them a better more successful person with a brighter future, just like me.

We are going to fight for this program until it is reauthorized. We are going to stand together for school choice. No one is going to take away my dream of a successful future. I now presently stand representing the youth of DC and the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Everyone should have a choice in where they are educated, including the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.

**Comments on the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program
Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
Dirksen Center Office Building, SD-342**

**Bruce B. Stewart
Head, Sidwell Friends School**

Thank you for having me here today to speak about this important issue. School choice, I believe, is as fundamentally American as apple pie, and DC's experimental Opportunity Scholarship Program is a significant means of providing District families with a whole new awareness regarding the best options for their children's academic growth. Indeed, this initiative has prompted scores of historically underserved people to think even more carefully, thoughtfully and critically about the education of their sons and daughters.

How America cultivates its human capacity will undoubtedly shape our national economic viability. As McKinsey and Company has so aptly noted in its recent research efforts, the racial, economic and regional gaps in education across our country "impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession." ¹ That is a powerful observation.

¹ "The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," McKinsey and Company, Social Sector Office, April, 2009. http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector/achievement_gap_report.pdf

Hence, I believe that we—and each of you in particular—must do all that can be done to sustain Opportunity Scholarships for the young people of the District.

I think we would all agree that choice and competition are fundamental threads in our country's fabric. We have, I believe, a strong national conviction regarding alternatives. Isn't it far more American to select from options and opportunity ranges—in the marketplace, in health care, in vocation, in religion, in location of our homes, in election of our public officials—and in a host of other key value decisions—than to select from heavily restricted options or a single, forced choice.

For me, involvement with OSP has brought my own early public school experience vividly back to life. As a young man who grew up in a largely immigrant community in Lynn, Massachusetts, I hold clear recollections of family and neighbors deeply concerned about the community's schools and the opportunities they did or did not present for their children. Hence, throughout my career as an academic administrator, I have maintained the strong conviction that every child should have the option to attend a school of appropriate academic fit regardless of place of residence. In my time, public, parochial, independent, vocational and boarding schools were all options. Choice was often the product of particular personal or family beliefs, but academic rigor and preparation for vocational and college study were also

top-tier considerations. It is good to see these mindsets returning to the forefront in DC, and to know that families are once again engaging in a reflective discussion about their children's school placement. I think there is little question that society benefits immensely when opportunities are offered to all, not simply to some.

Let me offer a personal observation from my own career journey. My first full-time teaching assignment was in public education in Greensboro, North Carolina just after the "sit-ins" at the now historical Woolworth lunch counter. As a teacher and ninth grade guidance counselor, a very important part of my work was with a dozen or so young Black Americans who were the first of their race to enter Walter Hines Page High School. They were "given choice," but that "opportunity" required unparalleled courage and conviction—and led them through great personal pain and sacrifice—simply to "enjoy" equal access. That experience immediately inspired in me a strong determination to do all that I could to see that every young American, regardless of background, received a fair chance at the best education possible. It is still my hope that this goal will one day be fully met, and not as a matter of random occurrence but rather through carefully reasoned public policy.

School integration by race has made a true difference, and I believe that greater school mixture by economic standing must continue. We must not allow one racial

or socio-economic tier of our society to flourish while others languish. The one and the many are and must continue to be inextricably intertwined if we are to achieve the full potential so powerfully present in our ever-maturing democracy. For justice's sake, we cannot have the connected rife with choice while the disenfranchised remain captured by circumstance!

Over the past fifty years, I have personally experienced the maturation of our society's growing commitment to racial equality. Serving as one of the founders of the North Carolina School of the Arts (working with Governor Sandford), as a consultant to the development of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics (working with Governor Hunt), as Director of Admissions, Provost and Acting President at Guilford College, as Head of Abington Friends School, and now as Head of School at Sidwell Friends, I have thankfully had numerous opportunities to advocate for social justice. In each case, one of my professional priorities was increasing student access, not only in terms of race, but also in relation to economic background. It made no sense to me, as the son of a Scottish immigrant who attended school only through the third grade, not to do all in my power to make certain that every child could gain access to the school of his or her choice. My father's words always echoed in my ears: "Boy, I crossed the great pond [the Atlantic] to give you learning opportunities that I could never enjoy. Don't ever make excuses. Achieve! Be all that you can be!" That was his dream for me, and for

nearly fifty years that has been my dream, as an educator, for every American child.

I am very proud of the fact that today Sidwell Friends School enrolls a truly diverse community of students. Currently, we serve two students who have qualified for OSP grants and three who are Signature Scholarship recipients—both programs being administered by the Washington Scholarship Fund. Each of these young people has prospered, having worked determinedly to take full advantage of the School's varied and rigorous curricular and co-curricular programs. Sidwell Friends is honored to be their school of choice. Clearly, all of these youngsters—and many more enrolled at other independent and non-public schools across the District—reached for a challenging education.

When the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program was originally announced there were many members of the independent school community who were quite qualified in their endorsement of it. Sidwell Friends School, however, felt that young boys and girls should not be trapped in a school ineffective for them and their needs and abilities simply by quirk of birthplace, race, income or current home address. Therefore, I am happy to say that SFS was the first such institution to step forward to participate in the OSP, and without any measure of reservation. We believed that a new set of applicants from modest economic circumstances would be motivated to consider independent and other educational options because they would now have the

support—fiscal and otherwise—to do so. As a result, Sidwell Friends School would be able to educate and benefit additional deserving children. And, while we felt we would proffer great service to them, there was no doubt in our minds that they, in turn, would significantly enrich our school community by bringing an invaluable perspective into our classrooms.

As Neil Rudenstine, former President of Harvard University, once so aptly observed, what an academic value it is to have “every face present and every voice heard” in the classrooms of our nation. There is no way, he knew, of achieving the academic excellence we all seek without that crucial variety. Yes, access is morally appropriate, but diversity is absolutely fundamental to learning at the highest level. I think of my own teaching of high school economics. What kind of classroom could one have, and what sort of discourse could one prompt—in a discussion, for example, of national housing policy—if nearly everyone present is either from the comfort of affluence or the challenge of poverty. Good exploration of any concept requires multiple voices and varied perspectives, and not narrowly synonymous thought. For authentic excellence in education, we desperately need to ensure that there is a true mixture of diversity and complexity in all of our academic dialogues.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program is the beginning of the opening up of the genuine possibility for all American students to know and experience one

another. What could be better for the goal of ending the polarity of "red and blue" in America, which I know you desire, than the creation of a nation of citizens who respect and understand the perspectives held by people of differing backgrounds and viewpoints. Our collective essence as Americans has always been the source of our truest strength. Please don't allow this important step toward pluralism that OSP represents to recede. Keep the windows you have opened open, and unlock even more! Go forward and not backward: enlarge our national vision, do not narrow it!

Horace Mann, who was an early and distinguished national leader of public education in America, called upon us "to be ashamed to die until we have won some victory for humanity." I strongly implore you to make certain that the positive steps already taken with OSP do not slip quietly away by virtue of inaction. Ensuring the opening of our educational system so that all are served and served well cannot be left to a matter of chance; rather, it must be brought to a condition of certainty. Continuance of the Opportunity Scholarship Program is one powerful step in that direction!

Thank you.

DR. PATRICK J. WOLF

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE HEARING "THE D.C. OPPORTUNITY
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: PRESERVING SCHOOL CHOICE FOR ALL"**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS**

MAY 13TH, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Senators,

I am pleased to be with you today to discuss the results of the three-year impact evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). I am the principal investigator of an outstanding team of researchers conducting that congressionally mandated study supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. I am also a professor of education policy at the University of Arkansas with more than a decade of experience evaluating school choice programs in the District of Columbia and other U.S. cities. Although the facts that I present to you today are taken directly from the impact evaluation, the ideas and opinions that I express are mine alone and do not necessarily represent any official positions of the evaluation team, the University of Arkansas, the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education.

Study Background

Our evaluation of the OSP uses the most rigorous research method available for determining the impact of this school choice program. Parents who seek schooling options for their children are likely to be highly motivated to promote their children's educational success. That high level of parental motivation that leads parents to participate in school choice programs probably also contributes to greater student achievement over time, leading to what we call "self-selection bias" in the research world.

To ensure that parent motivation does not bias studies of school choice programs, researchers over the past decade have focused on evaluating them using experimental research designs called Randomized Control Trials (RCTs). With an RCT design, a group of students that all qualify for a voucher or scholarship program and whose parents are equally motivated to exercise school choice are subject to a scholarship lottery. The students who win the lottery become the experimental "treatment" group. The students who lose the lottery become the experimental control group. Since only a school voucher and mere chance distinguish the treatment students from their control counterparts, any subsequent difference in student outcomes for the treatment students can be reliably attributed to the voucher intervention. That is, the outcomes from the control group represent what would have happened to the treatment group absent the program, and the treatment impact is therefore the treatment outcomes minus the control outcomes. Because of the rigor of experimental designs they are often dubbed the "gold standard" for policy evaluations and are widely used to evaluate the efficacy of medical drugs and procedures prior to such treatments being made available to the public.

Student and School Participation

Two cohorts of students were followed for purposes of this evaluation. All of the students were attending public schools or rising Kindergartners at the time of application. Cohort 1 consisted of 492 students entering grades 6-12 in 2004. Cohort 2 consisted of 1,816 students entering grades K-12 in 2005. The characteristics and outcomes of these two groups, combined into an impact sample of 2,308 students by lagging the Cohort 1 outcomes by one year, have been the focus of our impact evaluation. A total of 1,387 students in the impact sample won the scholarship lottery and were thereby assigned to the treatment group, while the remaining 921 students who did not win the lottery were thereby assigned to the control group. Over the five years of program operation, other students have received scholarships without having to go through the lottery. These students were not included in the rigorous impact evaluation because no appropriate comparison group is available for them.

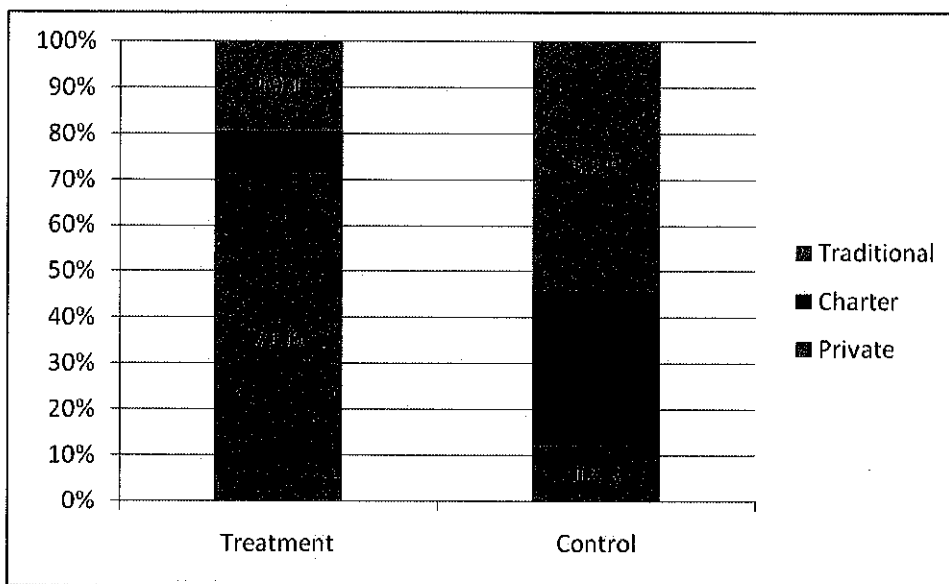
Evidence from the study confirms that the OSP serves a highly disadvantaged group of DC students. Descriptive information from the first two annual reports about program participation indicates that over 90 percent of students are African American and nine percent are Hispanic. Their family incomes averaged less than \$20,000 in the baseline year in which they applied for the program. Overall, participating students were performing well below national norms in reading and math when they applied to the program. Forty-four percent of students in both cohorts were attending a public school designated as "in need of improvement" (SINI) between 2003 and 2005.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program is designed to facilitate the enrollment of low-income District students in private schools of their parents' choosing. It does not and cannot guarantee enrollment in a private school, but the \$7,500 voucher should make such enrollments relatively common among the students who won the scholarship lottery. The eligible students who lost the scholarship lottery and therefore were assigned to the control group still might attend a private school but they would have to do so by drawing upon resources outside of the OSP. At the same time, students in both the scholarship treatment group and the control group have access to a large number of public charter schools in the District.

The implications of these realities is that, for this evaluation of the OSP, assignment to the treatment group does not necessarily mean private schooling and assignment to the control group does not necessarily mean education in a traditional public school. Members of both the treatment and control groups attended all three types of schools – private, public charter, and traditional public – in year 3 of the voucher experiment, though the proportions that attended each type differed significantly based on whether or not they won the scholarship lottery (figure 1). Almost 72 percent of the students who won the voucher lottery and provided outcome data in year 3 were attending private schools. Only 12 percent of the students who lost the voucher lottery were enrolled in private schools in year 3. Over nine percent of the treatment students chose to attend a public charter school three years after receiving a scholarship offer, compared to almost 34 percent of the control group who opted for that public school choice option. About 19 percent of the treatment group students were enrolled in traditional public schools three years after the scholarship lottery, compared with nearly 54 percent of control group students in such schools.

I see these data as underscoring that the desire for an alternative to a neighborhood public school was strong for the families who applied to the OSP in 2004 and 2005. About 81 percent of them placed their child in a private or public school of choice three years after winning the scholarship lottery and 46 percent of them did likewise even if they lost the lottery. This was a group of families with a strong motivation to exercise parental school choice.

Figure 1. Types of Schools Attended by the Treatment and Control Groups in Year 3



Source: Wolf et al., *The Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years* (NCEE 2009-4050), Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2009, Table 2-7.

The enrollment pattern of students in the evaluation also highlights the fact that the comparison of the treatment and control groups in year 3 does not amount to a comparison between “all choice” and “no choice.” Instead, it is a comparison of outcomes between a group exercising lots of private school choice and some public school choice with a group exercising a small amount of private school choice and a substantial amount of public school choice. Any differences between the outcomes of the treatment and control groups therefore indicate the incremental impact of adding private school choice through the OSP to the existing schooling options for low-income DC families.

If one’s purpose is to evaluate the effects of a specific public policy, such as the OSP, then the comparison of the average outcomes of the treatment and control groups, regardless of what proportion attended which types of school, is most appropriate. A school voucher program cannot force scholarship recipients to use a voucher, nor can it preclude control group students from attending private schools at their own expense. A voucher program only can offer students scholarships that they subsequently may or may not use. Nevertheless, the mere offer of a scholarship, in and of itself, clearly has no impact on the educational outcomes of students. A scholarship could only change the future of a student if it were actually used.

Fortunately, two statistical techniques are available that draw upon the unbiased results of the pure experimental analysis of treatment and control group differences. In the opinion of many researchers, including myself, these methodological approaches produce reliable estimates of the average effect of using a voucher compared to not being offered one and the average effect of attending private school with or without a voucher compared to not attending private school. The technique that produces the estimate of the effect of using a voucher is called a Bloom adjustment. Since lottery winners who never used a scholarship could not have been affected by

it, the average impact of the voucher program on student outcomes that was generated by the entire sample of treatment students – users and non-users alike – is simply re-scaled by dividing it by the percentage of the treatment group that actually availed themselves of the treatment. For example, if 80 percent of the treatment students used their scholarships at any time since the voucher lottery and the treatment group as a whole averaged test score outcomes that were 4 points higher than the control group, the Bloom-adjusted estimated effect of using a scholarship on test scores would be 4/.8 or 5 points.

The method for estimating the effect of attending versus not attending private schools, called Instrumental Variable (IV) analysis, produces estimates that tend to be larger than Bloom-adjusted estimates because they adjust for both non-use of the scholarship by the treatment group and private school attendance by members of the control group. As such, an IV analysis of the effect of private schooling is not an evaluation of a school voucher program *per se* but, instead, is an evaluation of the effect of the condition (private school enrollment) that a voucher program seeks to facilitate. Because such analyses place heavy demands on the underlying data, smaller differences that are found to be statistically significant at the purely experimental stage can end up as larger differences that are not statistically significant when estimated through IV analysis. All three effect estimates – purely experimental, effect of use, and effect of private schooling – are provided in the remainder of this testimony so that individual readers can decide which outcomes are most relevant to their considerations.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program and Student Achievement

Our analysis of the data after three years of participation in the OSP revealed that the program had a statistically significant positive impact on the test scores of students in reading (table 1). The positive impact of the voucher program on student reading scores after three years amounted to an average gain of 4.5 scale score points across the entire treatment group, 5.3 scale score points for scholarship users in the treatment group, and 7.1 scale score points for attending private versus public school. These results are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. We know from this study that participating DC students are reading at higher levels as a result of the Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Table 1. Year 3 Overall Achievement Impact Estimates of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling

Student Achievement	Impact of the Scholarship Offer			Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
	Treatment Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Estimated Impact)	Adjusted Impact Estimate	IV Estimate
Reading	635.4	631.0	4.5*	5.3*	7.1*
Math	630.2	629.4	.8	1.0	NA

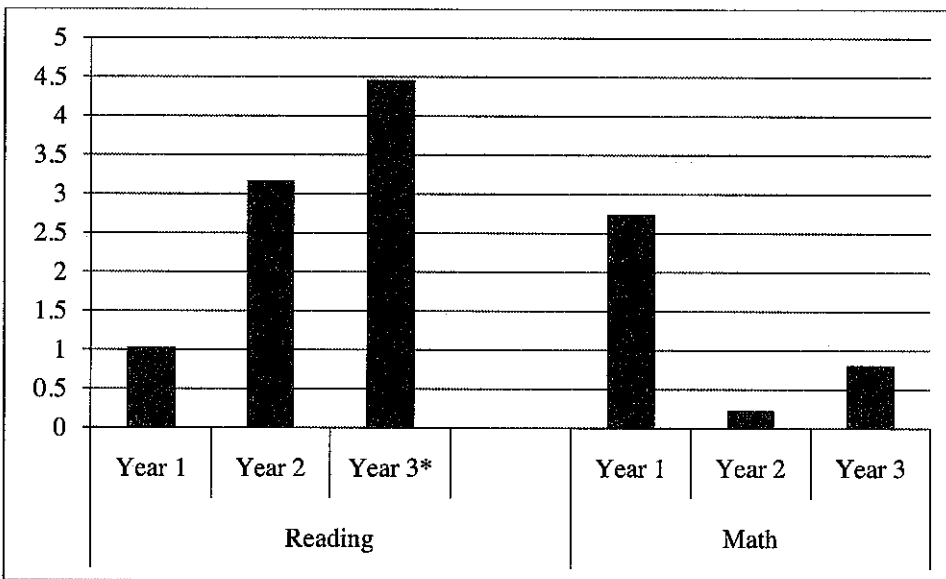
*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Tables 3-2 and E-1.

No statistically significant impacts were observed in math and therefore no estimate of the effect of private schooling on math achievement was attempted by the evaluation team (table 1).

Examined over time, the pure experimental impacts of the scholarship offer appear to show a trend towards larger reading gains cumulating for students in the program (figure 2). Especially when one considers that students who used their scholarship in year 1 needed to adjust to a new and different school environment, the experimental reading impacts of 1 scale score point (not significant) in the first year, 3.2 scale score points (not significant) in the second year, and 4.5 scale score points (significant) in the third year suggest that students are consistently gaining in reading performance relative to their control group peers the longer they experience the OSP. No such trend is apparent regarding math achievement.

Figure 2. Experimental Achievement Impacts of Scholarship Offer in All Three Years of Evaluation



*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Figure 3-3.

In sum, the OSP generated clear achievement gains in reading after three years but no discernible impacts in math.

The Pattern of Achievement Impacts by Key Subgroups

Beyond the crucial question of whether or not students tended to benefit academically from a program, policymakers and the broader public are often interested more specifically in who benefited and by how much. To address this question, the evaluation of the OSP has examined the impacts of the program for specific subgroups of students. Such subgroup analyses require that evaluators carve up the overall study sample into smaller constituent parts. As a result, less data inform each impact estimate, making them less precise and therefore less likely to identify statistically significant impacts. In addition, evaluating the impact of a program on different sub-

groupings of participants requires multiple significance tests, any one of which, at the 95 percent confidence level, has about a 5 percent chance of being a false discovery. With each subgroup impact examined, the risk of at least one false discovery increases somewhat. The impact evaluation conducted statistical tests to determine which subgroup findings could be false discoveries. As a result, three types of findings emerge from the subgroup analysis in the evaluation: findings that are clearly statistically significant, findings that are statistically significant with reservations (because “false discovery” could not be ruled out), and findings that are not statistically significant.

When examined as separate subgroups, three types of students clearly experienced significant reading impacts as a result of three years in the OSP (table 2). Public school students who were not attending schools in need of improvement prior to entering the program gained an average of 6.6 scale score points in reading if in the treatment group, 7.7 scale score points from using a scholarship, and 10.3 scale score points from private schooling. Students in the higher two-thirds of the performance distribution, whose average reading test score was at the 37th National Percentile Rank at baseline, gained 5.5, 6.2, and 9.5 scale score points in reading achievement from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling respectively. Students entering K-8 at baseline, where slots were plentiful in a wide variety of participating private schools, gained 5.2, 6.0, and 8.3 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling after three years. These impact estimates were statistically significant and remained so after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

Two other individual subgroups of students demonstrated reading impacts from the program that were not as robust. Female students gained an average of 5.1 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, 5.9 scale score points from using a scholarship, and 6.1 scale score points from private schooling. Students in Cohort 1 – the eager “first movers” into the program – gained 8.7, 11.7, and 15.8 scale score points in reading from the scholarship offer, scholarship use, and private schooling respectively. However, the estimation of the private schooling effect was not statistically significant and statistical tests indicated that the impacts of the scholarship offer and scholarship use could have been false discoveries for both of these subgroups.

Reading impacts for the other five subgroups examined individually – applicants from schools in need of improvement (i.e. SINI), students in the lower one-third of the performance distribution at baseline, males, students entering high school grades at baseline, and students in Cohort 2 – were not statistically significant after three years. This does not mean that those subgroups of students did not benefit from the program, as research results never prove a negative, but it does mean that reading gains were not clearly evident at the subgroup level for those types of students. The fact that significant reading impacts were not observed for the subgroup of SINI students is noteworthy, since Congress designated SINI students as the highest service priority for the program. Math impacts were not statistically significant for any of the 10 subgroups examined.

Table 2. Year 3 Subgroup Achievement Impact Estimates of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling

Student Achievement	Impact of the Scholarship Offer			Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
	Treatment Group Mean	Control Group Mean	Difference (Estimated Impact)	Adjusted Impact Estimate	IV Estimate
SINI never	625.3	618.7	6.6**	7.7**	10.3*
Higher performance	644.7	639.3	5.5*	6.2*	9.5*
<i>Female</i>	<i>639.3</i>	<i>634.2</i>	<i>5.1*</i>	<i>5.8*</i>	<i>6.1</i>
K-8	627.3	622.1	5.2**	6.0**	8.3*
<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>672.9</i>	<i>664.2</i>	<i>8.7*</i>	<i>11.7*</i>	<i>15.8</i>

*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Subgroup results in italics were not statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Tables 3-3 and E-1.

Overall Impacts on Parent and Student Satisfaction

Whenever school choice researchers have asked about satisfaction with schools, parents who were given the chance to select their child's school have reported much higher levels of satisfaction. Students themselves, for any number of possible reasons, have rarely described themselves as more satisfied with the new schools chosen by their parents. The year 3 satisfaction results from the OSP evaluation fit this pattern of previous studies. The proportion of parents who assigned a high grade of A or B to their child's school was 11 percentile points higher if they were in the treatment group, 12 percentile points higher if their child actually used a scholarship, and 21 percentiles higher if they were attending private school in year 3 of the study. Parents also were significantly more confident of the safety of their children in school if they had been awarded an Opportunity Scholarship. Students in grades 4-12, when asked similar questions, were no more likely to be satisfied with their school or describe it as safe if they were in the treatment compared to the control group.

Interpreting the Findings

What does this pattern of results suggest about the effectiveness of the OSP? Any answer to that question is bound to be somewhat subjective, so I think the best way to begin is to compare the achievement impacts from the OSP with those from randomized control trial of other education programs.

The National Center for Educational Evaluation (NCEE) at the Institute of Education Sciences has released the results of 11 studies that, like this one, employ the methodological rigor of random assignment to treatment and control groups. The DC OSP evaluation is one of only four of these 11 NCEE studies to report overall statistically significant positive achievement impacts in either reading or math (table 3). The other three discreet federal education programs which have been confirmed to deliver overall achievement impacts are "Enhanced Reading Opportunities," "Closing the Gap," and "After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction."

Six other federal education programs -- covering approaches such as student mentoring, Reading First, classroom interventions in Even Start, alternative teacher certification, initial

teacher training, and professional development -- have not demonstrated statistically significant achievement impacts overall. One program demonstrated a mix of non-significant and negative impacts on reading. Several of these education programs have only been evaluated for one or two years, and could show significant achievement impacts in subsequent reports. The larger point is that many federal education programs targeted at disadvantaged students are now the subjects of rigorous evaluations. Most of these programs have yet to demonstrate the ability to move disadvantaged students to significantly higher levels of academic achievement. In my opinion, by demonstrating statistically significant impacts overall in reading based on an experimental evaluation, the DC OSP has met a tough standard for efficacy in serving low-income inner-city students.

Table 3. NCEE Intervention Studies in Order of Significance of Achievement Impacts, May 2009

NCEE Single Intervention Study	Overall Significant Impact	Partial or Subgroup Sig. Impact
1 Enhanced Reading Opportunities	positive (1 year)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
2 Closing the Gap Impacts on Reading Comprehension	positive (1 year)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
3 DC Opportunity Scholarship Program	positive (reading), no effect (math) (3 years)	some positive subgroups, some no effect
4 After-School Programs and Enhanced Academic Instruction	positive (math), no effect (reading) (1 year)	n/a
5 Student Mentoring Program	no effect	some positive subgroups, some no effect
6 Reading First	no effect (3 years)	improvements in student decoding skills
7 Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes in Even Start	no effect (literacy measures)	improvements in parenting skills and children's social skills
8 Teacher Certification Routes	no effect	n/a
9 Comprehensive Elementary Teacher Induction	no effect (student achievement, teachers' practices, or teacher retention rates)	n/a
10 Professional Development Interventions for Early Reading	no effect (test scores)	no subgroup effects
11 Impact of Selective Supplemental Curricula on Reading Comprehension	3 no effect, 1 negative (1 year)	Some no subgroup effects, some negative
Totals:	2 positive, 2 some positive/ some no effect, 6 no effect, 1 some no effect/some neg.	

SOURCE: Calculated from review of the most recent evaluation reports where interventions were compared to a control group (see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/>). Evaluations that merely compared interventions to each other are excluded.

At the same time, the fact that students who had been attending public schools in need of improvement (SINI), as a distinct subgroup, have yet to show significant gains from the program should not be ignored. The SINI students were designated by Congress as a service priority for the program. The data suggest that, as a subgroup, SINI students thus far are no better or worse off academically if they were offered a scholarship. It also is important to repeat that the statistically significant OSP gains, overall and for half of the subgroups, thus far have been limited to reading. Although significant gains were observed for two subgroups in math after one year, statistical tests suggested they might be false discoveries and no significant math impacts have been detected since.

How large are the statistically significant reading gains observed in the OSP overall and for half of the subgroups after three years? The magnitude of the gains may lie in the eyes of the beholder. One constructive way to view achievement gains, however, is in terms of additional months of instruction. The overall gains from the OSP observed after three years mean that members of the control group, who represent what scholarship students would have experienced absent the program, would need to remain in school an extra 3.7 months on average to catch up to the level of reading achievement obtained by scholarship users (table 4). When the IV procedure is used to adjust for control group students attending private schools, we see that private schooling added nearly five months of achievement to the reading skills of students over the three years of the study. If you were to ask a group of low-income inner-city parents if they would enroll their child in an education program that has demonstrated the ability to produce such reading achievement gains, I suspect that most of them would say "yes."

Private schooling appears to have had its largest impact on the reading achievement of Cohort 1 students, increasing it by over 25 months, though that result for this relatively small subgroup of students is not very robust and should be interpreted with caution. Female students gained 3.7 months (also not very robust), K-8 students 4.6 months, applicants from non-SINI schools 6.5 months, and higher baseline performers 7 months of reading, respectively, due to the private schooling opportunities made possible by the OSP.

Table 4. Estimated Impacts in Months of Schooling of the Scholarship Offer, Use of a Scholarship, and Private Schooling for Statistically Significant Reading Impacts After 3 Years

Student Achievement: Reading	Months of Schooling		
	Impact of the Scholarship Offer	Impact of Scholarship Use	Effect of Private Schooling
Full sample	3.1	3.7	5.0
SINI never	4.1	4.9	6.5
Higher performance	4.0	4.6	7.0
<i>Female</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>3.7</i>
K-8	2.9	3.3	4.6
<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>18.9</i>	<i>25.5</i>

Subgroup results in italics were not statistically significant after adjustments for multiple comparisons.

SOURCE: Wolf et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years...*, Table 3-4.

If these trends were to continue over the entire educational experience of a typical treatment student who entered the program in Kindergarten, my calculation is that the student would be reading two-and-a-half years ahead of her peers in the control group who did not receive an Opportunity Scholarship by the time she graduated from high school. The reading gains from private schooling demonstrated by OSP students after three years are equivalent to about one-quarter of the notorious Black-White achievement gap. Although it is mere speculation at this point whether the impacts we have observed will continue at these levels, over 13 years of K-12 education similar results would eliminate the racial gap in reading performance entirely.

Future Research

The current rigorous evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program makes important contributions to our understanding of the effects of voucher programs and of private school attendance. However, there is much more that could be learned from the OSP – either through new data collection or even new analyses of what we have already obtained. The most important questions that remain to be explored include:

1. *What are the impacts of the program after four or five years of participation?*

The research team is well along in the process of collecting follow-up data from Cohort 1 after five years and Cohort 2 after four years since students were randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups. Analysis of those data will indicate if the achievement impacts observed for the OSP students after three years grow or fade, and will be an important topic of our final evaluation report, planned for release next spring.

2. *Does the OSP improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates?*

Unlike many other scholarship programs, the OSP enrolled older students (beyond grade 6). Although in our final report next year we will estimate the impacts of the program on educational attainment, only a relatively small proportion of students are old enough to be included in that analysis. In the coming years, there will be a substantial group of OSP students of high school age or older. Recent studies of charter schools suggest that their biggest impact may be on educational attainment. It is important to know whether or not voucher programs have the same effects.

3. *How do participating private schools differ from the public school students would have attended?*

The current evaluation is not the first to find academic benefits for students who use scholarships, but none have been able to adequately explore – much less determine empirically – why or how these impacts happen. There are many hypotheses: better instruction, better peer group of students, higher expectations set, more discipline, a smaller more nurturing school community, greater parent involvement. We surveyed parents, students, and public and private school principals about these school characteristics, but because of resource and time constraints, have only begun to tap the surface of examining the environments and organization of the two types of schools. A key question is whether there

are differences in instructional strategies or teacher quality, two factors found in other studies to affect student achievement. Such an investigation would likely require site visits, classroom observations, and surveys of teachers of students in the impact sample, which all have been beyond the scope of the current federal evaluation.

4. *Who participates in the OSP and who drops out?*

We have learned that, by year 3, almost half of the students who received an OSP scholarship have either graded out (graduated from high school), earned out (change in family income makes them ineligible), moved out of the District, or left the program for other reasons. It would be possible to use the current evaluation data to explore what types of students initially applied to the program, how and why students move in and out of scholarship use and private school enrollment, and how these patterns relate to program impacts. This information might help organizations that run voucher or private school scholarship programs identify students who might need additional programmatic supports and what types of supports might be helpful.

5. *Does the OSP have any effect on racial integration?*

Many people are concerned that school choice programs may affect the racial diversity of schools. It might be possible, with the current evaluation data, to estimate the impacts of the program on the racial composition of District of Columbia public and private schools. We could address two important policy questions surrounding scholarship programs. First, do the students who participate in such programs end up enrolled in schools with greater racial diversity than they otherwise would have experienced? Second, are the schools that scholarship participants leave as a result of the program better integrated racially as a consequence. The combination of school-reported and individual level data that we have collected provides a unique opportunity to examine these important questions.

Conclusion

For the past five years, the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program has provided income-disadvantaged students with government-financed scholarships or vouchers to facilitate their enrollment in participating private schools selected by their parents. Having collected and analyzed data from the first three years of student experiences with the OSP, we have learned much about the program. Students overall are reading at higher levels as a result of the OSP. No impacts have been observed in Math achievement. When the data are parsed into smaller subgroups, half of those individual subgroups of students are demonstrating reading gains as a result of the program. The SINI students, who are a service priority of the program, and four other student subgroups have not shown significant achievement impacts to date. Parents, but not students, say that they are more satisfied with their schools if offered an Opportunity Scholarship and they view those schools as safer.

Through a rigorous evaluation, much knowledge has been gained about the nation's first federally-funded school voucher program. We expect that more will be learned about this policy intervention in the future.