

Pell Grants for Kids

Bill Number:

Hearing Date: July 15, 2004, 10:00 am

Location: SD-430

Witness:

Catherine Hill

DC Parents for School Choice, Washington, DC

Parent

Testimony

I was born on October 5, 1937 in Prince George's County Maryland. My parents named me Catherine Lucille Brooks. I was the eighth of eleven children. When I was four years old my family moved to Railroad Avenue in Southeast D.C. I then began school Van Ness Elementary. I went onto Langston Junior High School then to Cardozo High school, before I graduated the 1954 Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education ruling was made and because of integration I was transferred to Eastern High school where I later graduated.

In 1958 at the age of 19 I married my husband James Allen Hill. My first daughter, Janice Hill was born later that year in 1958. In 1962 James L. Hill and in 1963 my youngest daughter Dana Hill was born. In 1963 my daughter Janice started school at this time I began looking for ways my children could get a best education. I looked into scholarships, but at that time there weren't many options. When my daughter entered the seventh grade I was able to attain a scholarship so she could attend Potomac Private School in McLean, Virginia.

After all of my children were in school I worked various jobs to bring in extra income. I also volunteered at Cooperative Play Program for the Department of Recreation, Dunbar High School, Park View Elementary School and Nativity Catholic School.

In 1984 I took on the responsibility of raising my oldest grandson, Keith Hill and in 1989 I started raising my youngest grandson, Kenneth Hill. In 1988 I enrolled Keith into our neighborhood school, Park View Elementary School. At that time I believe Keith needed more one on one help with reading and math skills and smaller classes. As a way to help my grandson to improve in his education I enrolled him into Noyes Elementary School and the following year he went to Options Public Charter School.

My youngest grandson, Kenneth Hill attended Park View Elementary from grades Kindergarten to Second grade. After Second grade Kenneth was granted a scholarship and I enrolled him into Nativity Catholic School in June 2004. He will be attending Archbishop John Carroll High School in fall 2004.

Now I am also raising my niece and nephew, Erica and Eric Brooks. I enrolled them in Park View Elementary School and their grades were average. So I decided to apply for the D.C.K-12 Scholarship so they could receive a better education. Through the grace of God our Lord Savoir I was blessed to receive a full scholarship for both children. I was one of the parents who fought for this scholarship program to receive funding for the

quality education that I feel that all children deserve.

In conclusion I feel that my work is not done because I am presently speaking on behalf of the D.C. K-12 Scholarship Program.

Bell Testimony

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Michael Bell

Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida

Assistant Superintendent School Choice and Parental Options

Testimony

I am Michael Bell, Assistant Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Schools, accountable for School Choice and Parental Options in the fourth largest school district in the nation. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and share my experiences undertaking to provide students with opportunities to access educational venues that more appropriately match their interests and abilities. These options reflect not only special programs but schools that have proven more effective in nurturing successful students. It is my particular endeavor to reach and encourage those students that require guidance in making their aspirations a reality. I am enthusiastic about the possibilities that The Pell Grant for Kids entails in enhancing the prospects of struggling individual students and the realization of the educational vision of our nation.

The Pell Grant for Kids is an opportunity to successfully provide appropriate and effective academic experiences for the astounding sixty percent of school age children whose family income is below the state median income. In the State of Florida, the percentage of school age children from low income families is 68%. The disparity between the academic performance of this group, primarily minority children, and their wealthier peers is gradually increasing. Robert F. Ferguson writing in the May 2004 Phi Delta Kappan warns that achievement disparities among today's students foreshadow socioeconomic disparities among tomorrow's families and may lay the foundation for a politically dangerous future of our society. Decades of intervention with federal funding to the school system accompanied by controls have proven inadequate. The Pell Grant for Kids model is generated by the significantly successful Pell Grant for college students and addresses the same factors. Empowering middle- and low- income children to emulate wealthier families in enrolling in institutions of their choice stimulates not only the students but prompts the schools to be more effective as a consequence of the competition for increased funding due to Pell Grant enrollment.

The 1971 school desegregation order prompted Miami-Dade County Public Schools to create a magnet school program which offers a wide range of school options that have been successful in diminishing concentrations of low-income students and improving student achievement. Federal funds originally made available to effect desegregation have largely diminished in availability. Programs such as Schools of Choice are one of the first to be impacted by challenges to the school budget. The Pell Grant for Kids would address this situation.

Our magnet program today is comprised of 70 magnet programs. Educational options have been expanded to include 31 charter schools, 16 controlled choice schools, two satellite schools hosted by major employers on their sites, and a Voluntary Public School Choice program, "I Choose!". There are currently thirteen "I Choose!" schools operating in the system that offer parents unique programs and facilities that mitigate toward higher student achievement. As of the 2004-2005 school year, approximately 14% of the total school population are participating in public school choice. The success of Miami-Dade County School Choice programs was recognized by the United States Department of Education, when it selected it as one of the top five school districts in the country. In 1998 Miami-Dade created an administrative division designated as School Choice and Parental Options to assist parents in navigating the broad range of possibilities being offered. This department evaluates, implements, and analyzes programs under its aegis, assists parents in accessing an appropriate placement for their child, develops new concepts in response to identified needs, and encourages community involvement. In so doing, School Choice and Parental Options is closing the achievement gap between the children of affluent parents and those of the low economic group which was documented in the district's Choice Achievement Report 2003.

According to a study by Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton published in 1996, the actual benefits to low achieving students enrolled in schools serving a more affluent population "come primarily from access to the resources and connections of institutions that have always received preferential treatment, and from the expectations, competition and values of successful middle-class educational institutions that routinely prepare students for college." These findings would suggest that enabling students from financially disadvantaged families to enroll in schools of choice rather than those that reflect the environment of their residences is of critical importance. Supporting this position is research done in 1994 by Amy Stuart Wells and Robert Crain in the St. Louis metropolitan area in which it was determined that 24% of all students enrolled in central city public schools graduated from high school contrasted with 50% of their fellow students attending suburban schools.

The money from the Pell Grant for Kids would allow each recipient to facilitate his or her participation in a program or school of choice. While enrollment does not hinge on a financial requirement, other factors such as a need for tutoring to enhance substandard

skills in order to survive in a more academically challenging setting, purchase of uniforms, payment of fees for after school enrichment programs, enrollment in intensive language programs, purchase of devices such as calculators or musical instruments, computers with Internet access, etc. draw on discretionary funds that are not available in lower income households. These factors are inherent in the success of the more affluent students and add to the disadvantage of the struggling child. Furthermore, exercising the right to enroll in a school of choice often entails accepting the responsibility for transporting students by the parents. This cost often precludes consideration of opportunities. A Pell Grant for Kids would diminish or eliminate many of the above hindrances and make more level the playing field for all of our children.

We cannot know how many capable, diligent, and even gifted children have been confined to a minimal realization of their potential denying the individual and our nation the possibilities of great achievement. A Pell Grant for Kids could be instrumental in dramatically rewriting the future of a particular student and through him or her, the society that he or she will impact throughout life. A dramatic example of intervention of this sort is illustrated in the experience of the 2003 Valedictorian of North Miami Beach High School. North Miami Beach has a Bio-Medical/Environmental Magnet Program in which this student was excelling her peers. The faculty noticed that she remained at school every evening until as late as she was allowed in order to access the Internet. She was a member of an impoverished household that could not afford a computer. Due to time limitations, she was unable to inform herself to the extent that her classmates did with their home computers and began falling behind. Distressed by this development, her teachers took up a collection and purchased a secondhand computer for her to use at home which proved critical to her academic triumph. This student was both deserving and fortunate. 'Fortunate' is not an acceptable component of our educational system.

Conclusion

If we hope to avoid the worst case scenario of a future comprised of a significant proportion of low socioeconomic families draining our resources and threatening our security we must empower today's students to access the most effective education possible. Our history of funding schools to accomplish this goal has proven a failure. The Pell Grant for Kids is a realistic and positive response that will impact both the individual's prospects as well as those of our nation. It has a proven history of effectiveness and addresses the very factors that underlie the failures in our current proposals and responses.

Thank you very much.

Endnotes

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Office of Civil Rights and Diversity Compliance of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Baseline Diversity Factors 2002-2003 Public School Choice Programs Student Achievement Report. 2004.

Ronald F. Ferguson, An Unfinished Journey: The Legacy of Brown and the Narrowing of the Achievement Gap, (Phi Delta Kappan, Bloomington: May 2004. Vol. 85, Iss. 9: pg. 658, 14 pages).

Gary Orfield and Susan E. Eaton, Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown V. Board of Education, (New York: New Press, 1996), p.7.

Amy Stuart Wells and Robert E. Grain, Stepping Over the Color Line: African American Students in White Suburban Schools, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Creating Strong District School Choice Programs (May 2004).