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Eva Moskowitz Testimony
Committee on Education and Labor
H.R. 4330 the All Students Achieving through Reform Act of 2009

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Good morning Chairman Miller and the members of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

It is a great honor to be here. As a former civics teacher (yes, there used to be such teachers) I consider it a privilege to be in this hallowed chamber. Thank you for considering my thoughts and views.

My name is Eva Moskowitz. I am the founder of Success Charter Network. We run four, soon to be seven, high-performing public charter schools. Our goal is to open up and manage 40 schools of phenomenal quality. We want to replicate our extraordinary success not only so that we can educate the kids within our four walls exceptionally well but so that we can pave the way for much more fundamental, systemic educational change and improvement.

Our nation has lost much of its competitive edge because while we have dramatically increased educational spending over last quarter century, we have failed to fundamentally alter student outcomes.

The good news is that we now have in locations across this country clear proof points of what works. While not all charters are high performing, there is a subset of charter leaders who have not only one great school but have replicated that success at multiple schools.

So we have suppliers. And we certainly have demand. In New York City, 5000 parents came out to win a spot in one of the Harlem Success Academies. Parents are voting with their feet, demanding excellent schools.

The time is therefore now for the federal government to play an important role in reversing our nation's educational decline by investing in high performing charter replicators. We need a high occupancy vehicle lane for our most successful charter leaders.

There's an anecdote about General Grant you may have heard. Someone told President Lincoln

than Grant was a drunk. Lincoln's response was that someone should find out what brand of whisky Grant was drinking and send a case of it to all of his Generals. Lincoln's point was that when someone is doing something right, you shouldn't micromanage them.

I would argue that the federal government has a critical role to play in supporting fast and smart growth of proven success.

To do so successfully, the federal government must protect the single greatest ingredient of success: autonomy. The whole concept of charters is that it is a compact between the state and the operator to deliver student achievement results in exchange for freedom.

I get asked all the time what is the secret sauce? How come your kids who are in a Title I school have outperformed affluent neighborhoods in New York City and around the state on state tests? Our school was ranked 32 out of 3500 schools statewide. We outperformed our school district by 20% in math and by 39% in reading. Nearly three quarters of our children are "advanced proficient" in math, compared with roughly one quarter in our school district. Our Harlem children outperformed those in Scarsdale – one of the wealthiest communities in this country.

How is it possible?

The answer is freedom. We have the freedom to get it right. The freedom to correct in real time when we get stuff wrong. The freedom to innovate. The freedom to work longer and harder. The freedom to organize our schools around children and teaching rather than the economic interests of grownups. Without this freedom, you would get the same results district schools get.

At Success Academies we have the freedom to invest in teaching and school leadership talent so we pay more than the local teachers contract. How do we afford this even though we get less per pupil than the district? Well, we choose to have larger class sizes so we can pay our teachers more and we don't rely on the Soviet-style procurement system of the district. Like many Americans, we go to Costco and Kmart and Target to buy our supplies.

We have the freedom to make science a non-second class subject by teaching it five days a week starting in kindergarten. We have the freedom to use technology in really smart ways, not only to improve student learning but perhaps even more importantly to improve teaching. At Success Academies we organize our resources both in terms of money and time around helping teachers get better. So much so that we are simultaneously running a school for kids and a school of education. But to do so requires freedom. Most district contracts only allow teachers to come in a few days before school starts. Our faculty spend 8 weeks a year getting training.

But while we are succeeding because we have this freedom, it needs to be constantly protected because the forces against reform get that this is the secret to our success. In our state capital in Albany this winter, politicians have put forth all sorts of bills to curb our freedom. They range from automatic unionization of charter bills to a quota system whereby charters would be capped and only allowed to educate a small percentage of a district. Indeed, replicators like us are a particular target. State Senator Bill Perkins, a Harlem politician, has a bill that would allow a single charter operator to educate only 5 percent of a district. These kinds of bills will kill replication, taking away the very freedoms that make high performing charters successful.

Chairman Miller and members of House Committee on Education and Labor: please help charters with a strong record of success serve even more kids. This entails both financial support of replication but also not tampering with their secret sauce, autonomy!

Eva Moskowitz is the Founder and CEO of Success Charter Network and the Harlem Success Academies.