

Opening Statement of Rep. Kevin Kiley (R-CA), Chairman
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary
Education

“Reimagining Education: How Charter Schools are Closing Gaps and
Opening Doors”

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(As prepared for delivery)

Over the past 25 years, charter schools have emerged as the single most impactful reform in American public education. Designed to provide public, tuition-free alternatives with increased flexibility in exchange for accountability, charter schools have grown from a handful in the early 1990s to over 8,150 schools serving more than 3.7 million students nationwide by 2024. In addition to providing parents with meaningful choices for their children, research shows that charter schools have particularly benefited low-income students and students of color in urban areas, creating new and innovative education models, extended learning time, and higher college readiness rates.

Indeed, a 2023 study from Stanford’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) showed that in math, charter school students learned the equivalent of an additional six days per year and in reading added 16 days of learning. The results are especially striking for at-risk students. Students in poverty achieve an additional 23 days of learning in reading and 17 days in math. Many charters have narrowed or even eliminated achievement gaps.

Results like these are remarkable. As the recent Nation's Report Card made clear, our education system has been in a state of steady and alarming decline. But charters are a rare bright spot. It's uncommon to find widespread education innovation that succeeds, helping millions of students, year after year. But charter schools do exactly that.

The benefits of charter schools go beyond just academic results. Charter schools open doors to innovation for teachers and administrators – charter school autonomy encourages teachers to pioneer fresh teaching methods, schools to develop better hiring practices, and educational boards to innovate in budget management. Charter schools also make it easier for parents to find schools aligned with their family's values. Perhaps that's why a national survey found that 81 percent of parents support expanding the number of slots in existing charter schools in their area and 78 percent want more charter school offerings in their area.

Today, we'll hear testimony about charters across the country that are getting amazing results for their students. We'll hear that charter schools are among the best educational options for high poverty and minority students. And we'll hear expert testimony that charter schools actually motivate traditional public schools to improve because of the healthy effects of competition; indeed, there is a tipping point for charter-school enrollment in a given region that lifts up all students, whether they're in charters or not.

Yet somehow, despite this incredible record of success, charter schools have come under attack from certain elected officials and interest groups who are intent on keeping students trapped in failing schools. Nowhere is this more evident than in my home state of California—a state that once led the way on charter school expansion but is now ground zero for the assault on educational freedom.

California has more charter school students than any other state, with over 700,000 children attending 1,281 schools. These schools serve over 12 percent of all public-school students and overwhelmingly serve low-income and minority families. But since taking office, Governor Gavin Newsom has led a relentless campaign to dismantle the charter school success story. His administration has signed laws to block new charters, deny renewals, and choke existing schools with red tape and funding cuts.

The two-pronged strategy is playing out as we speak: first, use state law and district politics to block new charter schools and deny renewals and expansions for existing ones; second, strip successful schools of their autonomy and bury them under the very bureaucracy and labor constraints that have paralyzed traditional schools. The goal is clear: protect a failing monopoly by eliminating competition. Instead of replicating what works, politicians in California and other states are punishing success, and students are paying the price.

Yet at this moment, we have an opportunity to support charters in powerful ways and expand their enrollment nationwide. And Congress can pass the High-Quality Charter Schools Act, which through strategic tax credits aims to vastly expand the numbers of proven, successful charters across the country. Specifically, the bill establishes a 75 percent federal tax credit for charitable contributions toward the start-up costs of nonprofit charter school organizations with a proven track record of excellence.

If the High-Quality Charter Schools Act were to become law, we would see tremendous schools like Success Academy and KIPP multiply across the country, with up to 6 million more students enrolling. This would be an enormous benefit not only to those students but to *all* students, as the expansion of charter schools – along with the private school choice

enabled by the Educational Choice for Children Act – would be powerful force for education reform across the country.

I'm looking forward to today's hearing, I'd like to thank all our witnesses for attending, and with that I yield to the Ranking Member for an opening statement.