

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

May 30, 2019

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are in receipt of a letter from the Oversight and the Education and Labor Committees Majority to you, dated March 29, 2019, seeking information and materials about the District of Columbia (D.C.) school voucher program authorized under the Scholarships for Opportunities and Results (SOAR) Act.¹ They initiated this inquiry without consulting Republican Members of the Committee. As such, we write to request information to supplement the material they seek.

The SOAR Act offers residents of the District of Columbia educational choices by equally splitting funds between D.C. Public School (DCPS), D.C. Public Charter Schools (DCPCS), and a private school scholarship program.² A recent study found that a SOAR scholarship increased a D.C. student's probability of graduating high school by 12 percent, decreased a student's likelihood of chronic absenteeism by almost six percent, increased student satisfaction by almost nine percent, and increased a student's feeling of safety by almost 12 percent.³ Another study from 2007, showed that school choice leads to greater civic values—including political tolerance, volunteerism, and political participation.⁴

The SOAR program has bipartisan support at all levels of government. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser explained that “[t]he program has been instrumental in supporting the District’s three-sector approach on education.”⁵ During the most recent bipartisan reauthorization attempt

¹ Letter from Elijah E. Cummings, et al., Chairman, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform, to Betsy DeVos, Secretary, U.S. Dep’t of Educ. (Mar. 29, 2019).

² See Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act, Pub. L. No. 112-10, 125 Stat. 38, 199-212 (2011).

³ INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES, EVALUATION OF THE DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM 5,6,8 (2019) available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20194006/pdf/20194006.pdf>; INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES, EVALUATION OF THE DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM xxi (2010) available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>.

⁴ DAN LIPS, HERITAGE FOUNDATION, NEW RESEARCH SHOWS ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF SCHOOL CHOICE (2007) available at <https://www.heritage.org/education/report/new-research-shows-additional-benefits-school-choice>.

⁵ Jenna Portnoy, *House Committees Scrutinize D.C.’s Federal Private School Voucher Program*, WASH. POST (Apr. 2, 2019) available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/house-committees-scrutinize-dcs-federal->

in 2016, eight of the thirteen members of the D.C. Council supported reauthorizing the program.⁶ In Congress, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) support efforts to reauthorize the SOAR Act in 2019.⁷

The Trump Administration has proposed doubling SOAR Act funding for 2020 from \$45 million to \$90 million.⁸ This proposal is supported by Mayor Bowser.⁹ To help the Committee understand how the SOAR Act has improved educational opportunities for D.C. residents, we ask that you provide the following data and information:

1. The average cost per pupil in D.C. public schools compared to public schools nationwide;
2. The change, if any, in per-pupil cost for D.C. public schools since the implementation of the D.C. school scholarship program;
3. The average household income of D.C. school scholarship recipients;
4. For every year since its implementation, the total number of applications for D.C. school scholarships, listed by year and by grade;
5. The results of both student and parent satisfaction surveys from schools that participate in the D.C. school scholarship program;
6. The results of both student and parent safety surveys from schools that participate in the D.C. school scholarship program;
7. The graduation rates of students in D.C. public schools compared to schools that participated in the D.C. school scholarship program; and
8. The attendance rates of students in D.C. public schools compared to schools that participated in the D.C. school scholarship program.

We look forward to working with you and the Trump Administration to reauthorize this vital program and ensure that D.C. students receive the best possible education. If you have any questions about this request, please ask your staff to contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

private-school-voucher-program/2019/04/02/1ebb0912-549e-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e_story.html?utm_term=.75266ea3aba1.

⁶ Jason Russell, *D.C. Council Changes Course; Supports School Vouchers*, WASH. EXAMINER (Mar. 8, 2016) available at <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/dc-council-changes-course-supports-school-vouchers>.

⁷ S. 213, 116th Cong. (2019).

⁸ OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET, THE WHITE HOUSE, A BUDGET FOR A BETTER AMERICA – PRESIDENT’S BUDGET FY 2020 1170 (2019) available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/oia-fy2020.pdf>.


⁹ Portnoy, *supra* note 5.

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Sincerely,



Jim Jordan
Ranking Member



Mark Meadows
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government
Operations

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
Chairman

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly
Chairman, Subcommittee on Government Operations