

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 2, 2009

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

We understand that you and your staff are determining how to implement the provisions relating to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) that were included in the Financial Services and General Government section of the fiscal year 2009 Omnibus Appropriations bill. The legislation provides \$14 million for OSP. We strongly believe that the U.S. Department of Education should continue to implement the program in accordance with the authorizing statute and offer as many scholarships for the 2009-2010 school year as appropriated funds allow. Under no circumstances should the funds be withheld by the U.S. Department of Education when so many children in the District need and deserve access to a quality school today.

We fully support the reforms sought by D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty and Chancellor Michelle Rhee to transform and improve the D.C. Public School System; however, the reforms will not happen overnight—they will take years to have the positive impact that we all seek. OSP provides an education alternative for low-income children who are unable to get into local charter schools and whose parents are unable to afford to send them to better performing schools. These students should not be forced to remain in schools that are failing because they are low-income and cannot afford another choice. OSP must remain a viable option for D.C. low-income families.

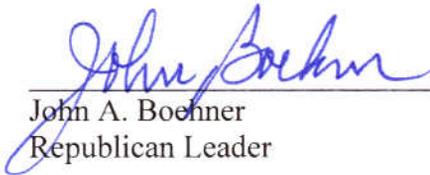
Mayor Fenty and D.C. Council Chairman Vincent C. Gray testified before the House Appropriations Committee in April 2008, expressing their support for the three sector funding approach: increased resources for D.C. public schools, public charter schools and the opportunity scholarships. It is important that Congress continue to support the three sector approach, which means utilizing the full funding allocation for each program. For OSP, the maximum number of students that can participate at current funding levels should be allowed to choose alternate education opportunities, so that they too have an opportunity to achieve academically in safer environments.

Since 2004, four consecutive research studies, conducted by Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas, have shown overwhelming parental satisfaction with OSP. In 2008, an Institute for Education Sciences report showed academic gain among OSP subgroups. The next report is due this Spring.

At a time when our Nation is facing an economic recession and families are making financial sacrifices, we should not eliminate educational opportunities for D.C. low-income families.

Every child deserves a chance to succeed and to achieve the American dream. The D.C. OSP is overwhelmingly supported by D.C. parents, giving their children an opportunity and a hope for their future. We strongly recommend that the U.S. Department of Education exercise its authority to offer scholarships to as many students as funding permits.

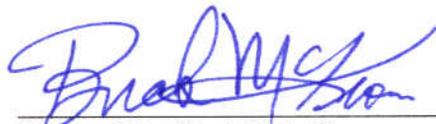
Sincerely,



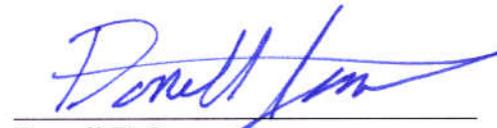
John A. Boehner
Republican Leader



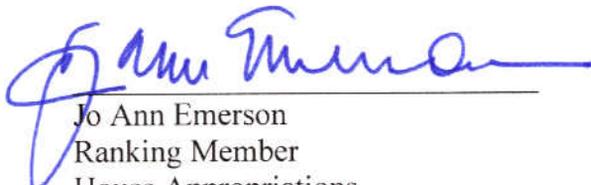
Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee



Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and
Labor



Darrell R. Issa
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Jo Ann Emerson
Ranking Member
House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial
Services and General Government



Jason Chaffetz
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal
Service, and the District of Columbia