

# Principal: Congress gets it wrong again

By Valerie Strauss

*My guest is [George Wood](#), principal of [Federal Hocking High School](#) in Stewart, Ohio, and executive director of the non-profit [Forum for Education and Democracy](#), a collaboration of educators from around the country. In this post, Wood writes about a [hearing](#) scheduled today by the U.S. House Education & Workforce Committee entitled "Education in the Nation: Examining the Challenges and Opportunities Facing America's Classrooms."*

By George Wood

A while ago [I wrote](#) that I was disappointed that no one in Washington was interested in the wisdom to be found in our successful public schools. I put it this way, “Would somebody please explain to me how the success of my staff, and many schools just like ours, is no longer of value to a nation that seems to still want a good public education system?”

Today it feels like déjà vu all over again.

I received from the esteemed U. S. House of Representatives news that [the first hearing](#) to deal with education policy has been scheduled! In the new era of small government, of listening to the people, of getting Washington out of the way of real reform I was hoping the hearings this time around would be different. No more would policy wonks that have never dared put a foot in a classroom be ushering in school reforms that were unproven at best, damaging at worst.

No, now we would hear from, as Carl Sandburg said, ‘the people, yes, the people.’

Imagine a room full of teachers who were making a difference in the lives of children—teachers who actually taught a child to read, who helped a student discover the love of science, or who knew how to manage a classroom of 28 adolescents when they first dissected a worm—talking to our esteemed members of Congress on what they needed to keep up the good work!

Stunning!

The preliminary word was that today's hearing would consider how “many states and local school districts have adopted innovative solutions to improve academic performance, enhance accountability, and involve parents in their child’s education. Federal policy should not undermine important efforts underway at the local level to advance student achievement.

[Members of the committee](#) will hear testimony that describes the challenges and opportunities that states and local school districts face in preparing students for success, and examine the current federal role in the nation's education system.”

Hot damn!

But then I went to the witness list. Four witnesses, with a combined classroom experience of (at least to what they will admit on their official biographies) *nine years*. Oh, and apparently most of that was nearly a quarter of a century ago.

But no worries, maybe they know something about public education and how to make it better.

Well, only if you think the best way to go is to end public education, give parents vouchers, and hope everything turns out all right. The members of congress will hear from an Arizona leader of a school choice organization whose web site streams cute videos of kids but runs banners about how to gut public schools. And then there is the fellow from the [non-profit Cato Institute](#) who would be happy if every public school in the country closed tomorrow.

What a shame, and what another lost opportunity. Once again the voices of those closest to kids, of those willing to forgo the law school option at the end of the two year TFA foreign service stint, of those who, like my wife, is spending another night planning for instruction using materials she bought with her own money, will not be heard.

Imagine if we did this to doctors, the military, or business leaders. Imagine if we simply held hearings in Washington D.C., where the most adamant critics of their work were given free rein to call for the socialization of medicine, the elimination of the Department of Defense, or the firing of the most senior CEOs. Too hard to think about? Well, its what is happening to our teachers as their voices are silenced and their experience devalued.

Today, I'll be at school, in the company of expert craft persons, who have given their lives to teaching kids in one of the poorest areas of our state. And who every day make a difference in their lives—from getting them to college, teaching them how to write for publication, and arming them to be a citizen in our democracy.

Lucky me. And too bad for America who will continue to be subject to policies from Washington that are more about ideology than ideas.

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