

PAA wants US House Ed Committee to open debate

The Education and Workforce Committee of the US House of Representatives is holding hearings on "innovation" in education policy today. The list of witnesses completely excludes the people who have the greatest stake in public school improvement - parents. The witnesses also represent a single, ideologically driven approach to educational policy that has yet to produce significant benefits for American schoolchildren.

All four witnesses are pro-privatization: Dr. Tony Bennett, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction, a strong supporter of charter schools and "virtual charter school" expansion; Lisa Graham Keegan of Education Breakthrough Network, a supporter of vouchers, high stakes testing and charter schools; Andrew Coulson of the CATO Institute, yet another supporter of charter expansion and vouchers; and Ted Mitchell, CEO of the New Schools Venture Fund, which funds charter school expansion.

The founding members of Parents Across America spoke out against this unbalanced hearing:

"It is not in the best interests of children if House Committee members only hear testimony from people who support the current corporate agenda of further privatization, charter expansion, and high-stakes testing. The majority of public school parents oppose these strategies, and we know that none of them have worked to improve schools in Chicago or anywhere else in the nation," said Julie Woestehoff of Chicago's PURE and a co-founder of PAA. "We call on the committee to act responsibly and also hear other viewpoints including those of parents, who have the most at stake in these decisions."

"Experimentation on children with unproven fads is not 'innovation,' " said PAA founding member Caroline Grannan of San Francisco. "We need reforms that have been proven to work, like smaller classes, encouraging parent involvement, and meaningful assessment instead of battering our children with endless bubble-in tests. Parents want reforms that improve schools rather than weakening them."

Leonie Haimson of New York City's Class Size Matters and Parents Across America concluded: "These points of view do not represent 'innovation' but privatization. The federal government seems intent on large scale experimentation on our children without parent consent. We demand that public school parents, as the most important stakeholders, be given a chance to testify at every Congressional education hearing from now on. These are our children, and our voices must be heard."