

Testimony of Kevin Kubacki

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

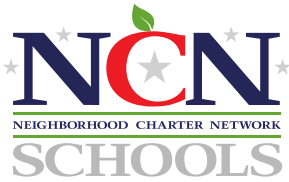
February 2, 2017

Chairman Rokita, Ranking Member Polis, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Kevin Kubacki, and I am the Executive Director of the Neighborhood Charter Network in Indianapolis. Thank you for inviting me to discuss how our schools, Enlace Academy and Kindezi Academy, illustrate that school choice can transform the lives of children.

I began this work as a charter school leader because I am first and foremost a father. I know what it is like to hold the hand of each one of my three children on the walk to school on the first day of Kindergarten, and I remember vividly hoping that the school would see my children the way I see them, that the school would recognize their individual strengths and truly make them the best versions of themselves. It takes incredible trust for a parent to hand over their most precious creation to a school, and I believe that schools must honor that trust. As a father, I refuse to accept that other parents might not feel the same trust in their own school. With a dedicated, talented, and diverse board, and an equally diverse and talented staff, we launched Enlace Academy in 2013 to give those parents another choice.

Enlace is the founding elementary school for The Neighborhood Charter Network's growing family of public, charter schools in Indianapolis that believe that every child can and will learn. The school is located on Indianapolis's west side, serving the families living in the International Marketplace neighborhood who are predominantly English Language Learners. In order to address the specific needs of each and every one of our students, we use a personalized, blended learning approach paired with intentional character development that is rooted in the core values: lead with love, embrace uniqueness, foster character, and ignite imagination so that our children can become leaders who chose their own futures in high school, college, and beyond.

Enlace Academy is a grassroots charter school whose name Enlace derives from the Spanish word for link or connection because the school seeks to be the hub of community for her families and create meaningful connections with community partners so that our whole families can be healthy and happy. Enlace currently has 365 students, 93% of whom are living in poverty. Nearly two-thirds of our students are English Language Learners, the highest percentage of any school in the state of Indiana. As a result of our high levels of family engagement and commitment, we have created a stable learning environment for our students, with a 90% retention rate and 96% attendance rate. Additionally, on the state assessment, our growth score of 115 points far exceeded the state average and earned us an A-rating, which



only 24% of the schools in Indiana received. We have done all of this without having to expel students. We truly believe all children can and will learn.

We are proud of the amazing work of our dedicated staff and students who are committed to achieving excellence each and every day. We also believe that our high student achievement results from rigorous systems of accountability. As a public school, we are held accountable to the state requirements for all schools. As a charter school, we are additionally held accountable to our authorizer for high academic achievement, strong financial health, and ethical governance practices. Most importantly, though, we are held accountable to the families we serve because, ultimately, if we don't honor the trust they place in us, they can choose a school that better meets their needs.

We are excited to be serving families in Indianapolis right now because of the strong school choice legislation that exists paired with the collective responsibility for the children that is felt by charter schools and Indianapolis Public Schools, our partner district. Enlace Academy was one of the first charter schools to partner with IPS as an Innovation Network school. In this symbiotic partnership, we are able to access the economies of scale of the district and utilize a district facility and, in exchange, we have the autonomy to educate kids in our innovative school model whose state assessment scores are counted for the district.

Furthermore, after seeing success at Enlace Academy, the district extended the partnership by allowing us to implement our successful practices in restarting one of their most academically challenged schools. We launched this school in August as our second school, Kindezi Academy. The name Kindezi originates as an African philosophy that preaches taking collective ownership of the education of the children, an apt name given the collaborative educational narrative in Indianapolis today. While we did receive the Charter Schools Program Grant funding when launching Enlace Academy, that option was not available in Indiana when we launched Kindezi Academy, and it is only through the strong partnership we share with IPS that our school is opened and profoundly changing lives today.

I am so proud to be managing schools that provide parents with options that can help meet the unique needs of their children and ensure that they reach their potential. Parents, not zip codes get to decide what school meets the specific needs of their children. Charter schools provide parents with options for their child to access a high quality education. The charter community now numbers more than 3 million students, and continues to grow, as more parents see the power of school choice. I believe offering parents broad school choice helps all students, as schools compete to serve and attract students to their schools.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and I look forward to your questions.