



**SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

**“STATE ASSISTANCE TO UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS IDENTIFYING LEVERS FOR CHANGE”**

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MS. CYNTHIA BROWN: Good morning. Oh good, a lively group. (Laughs.) I'd like to welcome you to the Center for American Progress this morning. My name is Cindy Brown. I'm the vice president for education policy here at the Center. And we're really so pleased to have such a great audience today for our discussion regarding the role that charter schools have in the education of Latinos and English language learners. And we're happy to be doing this in partnership with the National Council of La Raza.

We are releasing a report today on the topic of charter schools and Latinos and ELLs by Melissa Lazarin, CAP's associate director of education policy, and Feliza Ortiz-Licon, NCLR's regional director of education. The report, "Next Generation Charter Schools Meeting the Needs of Latinos and English Language Learners," was produced with support from Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation.

As you all know, the Obama administration has encouraged states to support the expansion of high quality charter schools by offering states to lift caps on new charters, a chance to win grants from the renowned Race to the Top competition.

The administration has also singled out charter schooling as a key strategy to turn around 5,000 of the nation's most troubled schools. It's not surprise that Latinos and ELLs are concentrated in these struggling schools and they're making up a greater proportion of public school students overall.

English language learners number over five million in grades PreK-12, making up over 10 percent of the nation's total public school enrollment. ELLs also make up a significant proportion, about 40 percent, of the second largest student population subgroup, Latinos. Latinos and ELLs are concentrated in urban and predominantly minority and low income districts and in traditional immigrant states like California and Texas, states that also have the greatest concentration of charter schools.

With this landscape in mind, this report examines how some charter schools are demonstrating results with Latinos and ELL students. We have representatives from two of these charter schools here today: Monique Daviss of El Sol Science and Arts Academy in Santa Ana, California, and Richard Farias of the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Houston, Texas.

The report also looks at key components of state charter school laws that can influence students' access to charter schools, as well as the instruction and services that are found in these schools. We look forward to getting more insight about what states and charter schools can be doing to better support this population of students from Peter Groff, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, who is also here with us today.

As public school enrollment numbers include more Latinos and ELLs and charter schools increase in prominence, we hope that today's discussion will highlight strategies and policy changes that can be applied at the state and school level to ensure that the next generation of charter schools is prepared to serve a progressively more diverse education system.

But enough from me, I'd like to turn it over to my friend and colleague Delia Pompa, NCLR's vice president of education, for a few remarks. We will then turn it over to Melissa Lazarin, who, as a coauthor of the report, will share some of the key highlights of the report, and then lead some of our guest participants in a discussion about charter schools and Latinos and ELLs.

So let me turn this over to you, Delia.

MS. DELIA POMPA: Thank you, Cindy and thank you to CAP for allowing us and inviting us to work with you on this project. It's an exciting project that comes at a time in the development of charter schools when I think it's time to start talking about our accomplishments and showing you how – what is happening in charter schools across this country is going to be an enduring change, I believe, and contribute much to the education of Latino and ELL students.

When NCLR began its work in charter schools, which was about 1999, you need to know that we were pushed to do this by our various affiliates. NCLR is a multi-issue organization, advocacy organization that is made up of over 300 affiliates all over this country. And our work in the nation's capital on charter schools was begun actually by our affiliates in the various states across this country, who had begun to implement and open charter schools on their own because as they looked around in their communities, they felt they could do a better job for kids than was happening for them in their neighborhood schools. So we got into the business and in about a five years span, we supported the opening of 50 charter schools. This was in addition to the schools that were already opened. Since that work began, we now have a network of over 100 charter schools. And some might ask me, "why aren't you giving me a specific number?" I'm not giving you a specific number because some of these charter schools have been so successful on their own that they keep multiplying and opening other schools. So we don't always have the number at hand.

So today, as this report is released, you're going to hear about some successes. You're going to hear about ways that we have found to address the needs of Latino students and the needs of English language learners as the community chooses to serve them. And that's one hallmark of schools in the NCLR network of charter schools. They are all community run schools, put in place by communities, with a lot of input from communities, in many cases being run very directly by the communities. These are not schools that dropped in from the national level. They are schools that have deep roots in the communities and reflect that when you visit the school. As a matter of fact, the principles of these schools continue to drives us in ways that help us to support them. They have developed on their own a set of core qualities that define what an NCLR

charter school. They continue to ask for technical assistance in all the new aspects of education. We're hosting a conference on accountability in October. And so what you see is a very organic evolution and development of a charter school network that you'll hear about from two of our principals today.

NCLR is not an authorizer. We don't run these schools. We convene them and we provide the technical assistance that they ask for. But they and their wisdom, I think, have guided the network very well. And I'm eager for you to hear from two of our schools today.

Thank you. Melissa?

MS. MELISSA LAZARIN: Thank you for joining us this morning. I'd like to spend the majority of our time discussing with our guests today about this topic. So I'll only go a little bit – I'll go briefly over the report.

Unfortunately Feliza Ortiz-Licon, my coauthor, can't be with us today. She's based in California and coming out to D.C. next week, so it's a little hectic for her. But as supporters of high quality charter schools, both CAP and NCLR felt it was important to address the topic of Latinos and English language learners in charter schools. And some of the reasons have already been mentioned already by Cindy and Delia. But just to go over some of these again more specifically, one reason – excuse me – one reason is that Latinos already have a significant presence in charter schools. Much of this has to do with the geographic concentration of Latinos in charter schools. There's a lot of overlap, as Cindy mentioned.

Four of the five states with the highest number of charter schools, California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida, are among the top five states with the highest Hispanic enrollment.

Second, charter schools are increasingly playing a larger role in the education of ELLs. We focus primarily on Latino ELLs in this report. An overwhelming proportion of ELLs are Latinos, 79 percent are Spanish speaking. And you'll see in the report that ELL enrollment in charter schools, from what we can find, is a little mixed. It's a little uncertain. What is more certain is that there is broad concern that the students might be overlooked by charters and as a result the administration is putting a lot of pressure on charter schools to make sure that they're equitably served.

Third, charter schools are being asked, as you all know, to play a larger role in turning around our struggling schools, and many of these have a large concentration of Latinos, as Cindy mentioned. A quarter of Latinos, 28 percent, attend schools that have been identified for improvement, compared to 9 percent of white students.

And fourth, there are lessons to be learned from high performing Latino ELL charter schools, like the ones we have here today. I think that most people will agree that if we come across any school that is demonstrating strong results with Latinos and ELLs,

we're really anxious to find out more. And the fact that charter schools can function in an environment where they can experiment a little bit more provides some unique learning opportunities for other charter schools and for traditional public schools.

So let me talk a little bit about the paper and what we did. We identified four high performing charter schools that have a large Latino population and that also have a large ELL population. We profiled El Sol Science and Art Academy in Santa Ana, California – Monique Daviss is here today – the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Huston Texas, and Richard Farias is here with us today, YES Prep Gulfton in Houston, Texas, and International Charter School in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, which actually has dual language programs in English and Spanish and Portuguese and English, so it's a very unique model. Unfortunately, they couldn't be with us today.

I won't go to other lessons that we learned from these schools and I hope you can read them in the report, but here are a few. From talking with these schools, it seemed that they use almost every tool available to them to recruit and keep the students that they have. And this includes relying heavily on strategies that engage parents and communities. Examples are from what we might already expect like translating materials into Spanish, but to also making annual home visits with every child's family, and not just new students. Every year teachers and the staff go – this happens at International Charter School in Rhode Island – every child's home is visited at the start of the new year.

Second, most of the schools take it upon themselves to provide training to staff on effective instructional strategies to engage ELLs. Several of the folks that we talked to alluded to feeling that the responsibility was really on them to provide their staff with the right kind of training, particularly for engaging ELLs. A lot of their staff didn't necessarily enter their school with this kind of training and preparation, so they have really invested a great amount of money and time and professional development in working with these teachers.

For some schools, this has also meant providing every staff person with some training on working with ELLs, not just the teacher that specializes in their instruction.

Expanded learning time – several of these schools also spoke about the importance of having a longer school calendar as part of their program model. And we actually have a report on our website about expanding learning time in English language learners that I would flag for you.

And fourth, the language instruction programs for ELLs at these schools really varies from dual language programs to more transitional English programs, but all really emphasize the importance of providing language instruction in the context of delivering core academic content, using applied literacy skills et cetera.

We also considered some of the most salient features of state charter laws that might affect students' access to charter schools and their instruction in these schools.

Enrollment and recruitment policies – Massachusetts, for example, recently revamped the charter law and it included a lot of changes for ELLs. The state now requires prospective schools to describe their recruitment strategy in the application process that encourages them to consider enrollment goals for ELLs. And charter authorizers must now consider a school's capacity to effectively serve ELLs in evaluating charter school applications.

These might seem like very subtle changes, but there're subtle changes that aren't in other state charter laws.

Second, access to federal and state categorical streams. It really varies from state to state, but it does appear that charter schools face challenges in accessing their share of federal and state dollars, including federal Title III dollars, which are targeted to English language learners. And I know that this is something that the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has been working on generally, trying to make sure that charter schools are able to get access to their fair share.

And charter autonomy, I want to point, plays a really important role here, especially for ELLs. This feature of charter schools has made it possible for charters to flexibly mould their school model, including using native language instruction and dual language programs in states that have banned such practices for traditional public schools. And I hope to talk to Monique a little bit more about that, since her school is in California, where they have banned that.

I think what we hope this paper will do is offer both charter schools and traditional public schools a glimpse of some of the strategies and practices that high performing schools working with this population of students are using.

We also hope that it will encourage at the state level to – folks at the state level to think about what they can do to further improve their charter laws for ELLs and Latinos.

I'm going to stop here and I want to invite our guests up here as I introduce them. If you could go ahead and make your way up. I think I have to sit in that last seat, so just save that one for me.

I'll introduce them briefly. Peter Groff is the president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Before joining the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, he served as a director of the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education. He was previously the founder and executive director of the University of Denver's Center for New Politics and Policy. Peter also served as the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the Colorado State Senate and was the first African American in Colorado to hold that post. He served in the Colorado General Assembly for nine years and passed landmark legislation creating visionary education reform measures, prohibiting racial profiling, and requiring booster seats for young children.

Monique Daviss has spent nearly 20 years serving the needs of underserved communities. As a teacher, public housing administrator, and as a nonprofit executive, Monique has remained committed to delivering quality programs and services to residents of low-income communities. Her current work as the executive director of El Sol Science and Arts Academy in Santa Ana, California, blends her experience as an education practitioner, nonprofit administrator, and advocate. During her tenure the school has made significant gains in academic performance, school enrollment, enriched programming, and financial growth.

Richard Farias is president and CEO of Tejano Center for Community Concerns in Houston, Texas, and superintendent of the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success. The center's mission is to improve life opportunities for low-income children and families through the provision of educational, social and health services, and community development initiatives. They do everything.

A pioneer in the charter school movement, he established the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success, which is one of the first 20 charters in Texas. And the school has grown from 100 students in 1996 to approximately 650 in Houston, I believe.

MR. RICHARD FARIAS: Nine –

MS. LAZARIN: Nine fifty, in Houston? Wow. Okay. PK-12 students. The school's successful and creative elements have caught the attention of educators across the country.

And I'm going to go sit down with them and start off by asking them a few questions. So this is more of a discussion. I'll then turn it over to you all, so please keep your questions handy and I'm sure we'll have a great discussion here.

So I'm going to start with Peter. Thank you for being here.

The Obama administration, as we've already mentioned here several times, has made high quality charter schools a key feature of their education reform strategy. What has been the reaction of the charter school community and what are they doing to prepare for this – for this challenge?

MR. PETER GROFF: Well, I think it's interesting. I've had the chance to not only work with the administration very early on as they began to put together their plan, particularly around Race to the Top and then the school improvement grants and trying to turn around those lowest performing 5,000 schools. And I think from the administration's standpoint, they saw charter schools as the vehicle to do that. Public schools that are innovative, partnerships that we've seen in both of these schools that you talked about in the paper, partnerships between teachers and parents and community really trying to drive achievement from the ground up. And so the administration saw that as the vehicle to turn around those schools, but also to increase the access to schools that we've seen be very successful.

I think from the charter standpoint, there's a great deal of excitement because I think for the first time you've had both parties kind of coming together, at least on that one issue, in terms of trying to increase the number of high quality charter schools, trying to funnel more dollars to those schools, schools that we've seen that are closing the achievement gap.

So I think there's a lot of excitement within the charter world, within the charter sector about really what is an era of unprecedented opportunity created by this administration, but really driven by the great work that you highlighted in your paper and represented by the two schools that are here today.

MS. LAZARIN: And we know as – that Latinos and African-Americans are – and ELLs are in these schools that are at the bottom. What should charter schools be thinking about to – as they think about how to really target these students specifically?

MR. GROFF: Well, I think that the target in terms of their thinking is to kind of replicate what works. We know, particularly and again when folks read through this report, they're going to see examples of what works, particularly with ELL students. That recruitment, that actually going out, reaching into the community, engaging parents at that level, using the language of the culture to help drive their understanding of a larger kind of mainstream culture that they are going to be a part of. And so I think just taking the examples that are already there and beginning to build on that. But then targeting, as you begin to open up schools – and we've seen a lot of growth as was mentioned earlier. We've seen a lot of kind of smart growth around targeting specific sets of students as these schools have done. And that ability again to create that partnership, using the strengths of the students there, using the language and the culture that they understand.

When you talk about cultural competency, it's not just trying to figure out how to make sure that you understand the students in the classroom, but it's using the culture that they bring into the classroom to drive knowledge, to drive understanding while creating the skill set in a different or mainstream community so they can bring those two together.

MS. LAZARIN: And I understand – I know I read this in a couple of places that the Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, at your conference, a couple of months ago, really challenged the charter school community to think about ways to target ELLs in particular and special education students. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MR. GROFF: You mean when he put us on the spot on the big screen? (Laughter.) Again, both he and the president have been very supportive of high quality charters, as everyone hopefully in this room and certainly on this panel are. But I think that what he challenged us to do is, one, to really have a very public conversation about how we deal with those low performing charters, but beyond that, also to challenge us to do more with ELL students. But I think when you look at the numbers and the numbers that charters are serving; it's a little bit higher than what traditional public schools are

serving. So I think from that standpoint, the sector is doing very well at serving ELL students.

MS. LAZARIN: Okay. Any reaction from Monique or Richard to what I mentioned – what we've talked about so far.

MR. FARIAS: So far, I think what's really important here, really, is to fully realize what we're doing. Charter schools are part of education reform movement in this country. What's been out there before and continue to be out there before charters is failing to many of our students. That's why there is a need for charter schools. That's why there was a need for me start a charter school in Houston.

MS. LAZARIN: Can you talk a little bit about that?

MR. FARIAS: Sure. I worked with the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department for 18 years and worked with very high delinquent youth and families that were broken and situations that just were pretty deplorable over kids. And that's why one of the reasons that I made home visits a part of our regular schedule was so that my teachers would fully understand what's going on with these children in the classroom.

We tend to think that kids come to school and they leave everything behind. That is just not the case. They bring everything right into the classroom. They do not learn in a vacuum. And so teachers are more aware of where these children come from, the more understanding they can be and the better they can work with these children.

And so that was the reason that I started the charter school in Houston. I had worked – working for Harris County Department of Juvenile Justice, I was fortunate enough to work with a lot of the schools in Houston and realized so many of the things that we're doing really was what was causing kids to fail. And so what I've put in place at our school is things that I knew were totally the opposite of what was happening in the regular public schools. And so that was a design of my school. My school was specifically designed to address the needs of low-income children at risk. And our success has been because we've stayed focused on our mission, making sure that each and every child was touched in a positive way through our school program.

MS. LAZARIN: And what was the response of the surrounding Latino community when you opened up your charter school?

MR. FARIAS: Well, when we opened, we opened up with 178 graders, so we opened up quite small. And it only took us 30 days to get the word out and we were able to fill our classes right away. And then, by the second year, we grew to 200 and then the third year 450, and then the third year 650. And now we're at 950. So there has been tremendous community support. The community families, in particular, realized that their children can be successful and all they really need is somebody to go there and show them the way. And that's what our teachers are able to do. And the fact that we have a very strong parent component I think it's what makes a tremendous difference. We

require our parents to come in and be part of the school. And they're empowered to come in at any time, make their recommendations, talk to the teachers. I maintain an open door policy when I'm there. Anybody can come in and talk with me about whatever might be the problem.

But what's really important as well is to understand that the Raul Yzaguirre is a community school if ever there was one. This school is owned by the community. They understand that it's their school. And any problems that we might have, they're part of the solution. They cannot just be part of the problem. And so we incorporate the needs of the families. The families understand it's their school. And they have to perform a minimum of 36 hours of service to the school or school related activity, which also includes – as we well know, many of our parents have not gotten a high school diploma. We have many parents that are illiterate. So what we build into our school program is an evening classes for adults, where they can learn – adult basic ed, GD, computer literacy, ESL, and citizenship classes. And so all those classes bring them. The parents are learning.

The main reason we wanted to do that was so that the parents could actually work with their children at home doing their homework. And so that's why that's such a critical piece to what we're doing.

There's so many different things that we can also talk about that I don't think we have time for it right.

MS. LAZARIN: Yes. No. And we'll definitely turn back to a lot of the wraparound services that both your schools I think are providing.

Monique, tell us a little bit about you school and what you think makes your school unique, not only from other charter schools, but the traditional neighborhood schools in your district.

MS. MONIQUE DAVISS: El Sol is a dual language school. We provide – we use the 90-10 model, so our kids are learning in Spanish 90 percent of the day as kinders and then adding 10 percent instruction. So by fourth grade, the goal is that they'd be both Spanish language proficient and English language proficient. And right now, 85 percent of our kids, by the time they leave in eighth grade are proficient or advanced in English Language Arts. So part of what we're using is the dual immersion to move these kids along. We have found a direct link between how kids are doing in Spanish Language Arts and how they're doing in English Language Arts. We use the Aprenda, which is a Spanish language test, and then we use the state testing. And we can correlate the outcomes in those two tests and see that if kids have strong language skills in one, they tend to have strong language skills in the other. So we're working on language competency.

The other thing that we do is we do an extended day, so while we have this year for PreK-8 close to 700 kids. We'll have close to 400 kids who stay till six o'clock. The

core stays till 3:00. We'll have another close to 400 who will stay till 6:00. And then as Raul's program, similar thing, then we'll have a whole another set of people, probably 300 adults who will come from 6:00 to 9:00 and do English ESL, computer, the same set of classes that come through the community college.

We also have parent involvement. We have – we also have a really strong music program and we'll be starting with our local Pacific Symphony an El Sistema type of program, where we will build symphony orchestra musicians from our community. We have poetry. We have lots of different programs, fine arts, dance.

One other thing that we see as an asset for our school in addition to the community itself, the parents, the students, and our staff, is that the organization can be nimble. It can move quickly to be responsive to the needs of the students and the needs of the teachers and of the school. So we can constantly evaluate and analyze what's going on and make shifts so that we're always targeting progress. And we've seen the progress in our students and we're really proud of what they've accomplished.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. Peter, any reaction so far to some of the services and the models that Richard and Monique have described about these schools, are you seeing these kinds of – is this typical of a lot of charter schools?

MR. GROFF: Well, I certainly think that the nimbleness and the swiftness to respond to issues basically is inherent in charter schools. That ability to be innovative and flexible in terms of being able to make changes is really at the heart of the charter model. So certainly we've seen that across the country. I think we're beginning to see at a more substantive level what's happening in Houston in terms of wraparound services, and we know that learning doesn't stop at three o'clock, that it has to continue, particularly for those kids that we have decided or determined they're at risk or students of color or poor students. We need to continue to drive what is being learned in the classroom, so the ability to keep the school doors open is so unique to success and raising achievement. But then wrapping around the services that students bring into the school, whether it's violence in the community or violence in home or other destabilizing functions in home they do bring to school, so the ability to work with them in terms of mental health services or health services.

I visited a charter school in Las Vegas, Andre Agassi School. And they have a medical clinic there and a nurse and doctor come in and work with these kids on a lot of the issues that they just haven't been able to deal with. And they've seen that that help drives their achievement.

So certainly what you're hearing today is what charter schools are about, understanding the whole child. And it's not just what happens in the classroom, but what that child brings in the classroom and then how you deal with it and how you're able to adjust and move to the needs of the students on any given day or any set of students that may come in from year to year.

MS. LAZARIN: Great.

MR. FARIAS: And I'd add that one other thing that – and I know a lot of charter schools are doing it – but the afterschool program, keeping the kids longer is so critical, not only for the good of the child, but for the good of the community because it's during 3:30 to six o'clock, when most kids get into trouble. If they're still at school, then they're not – it's much harder for them to get into trouble. And if you have a good program, not only a tutorial and a mentorship program, then all the kinds of activities that allow for cultural competence growth for them and for the teachers that get involved, it's really a win-win. And it's a very positive thing and a very important piece I think of what not only charter schools should be doing, but all schools across the country should be doing.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. So for this report, we purposefully sought out schools that have a high proportion of Latinos and a high proportion of ELLs. And as you guys – as you all probably know, charter schools for some time have faced criticism by their enrolling too many Latino and African-American students and enrolling too few English language learners. It seems like you can't do anything right. But what's your perspective on those kinds of criticism and how – for also your schools, those of you that are really at the local level, like what do you see of other charter schools that are in your district or in Houston and in your – in Santa Ana Unified – would be interested in hearing your thoughts, all of you.

MS. DAVISS: Our student population reflects – mirrors very closely the student population of the traditional public schools that are around us. I – a good portion of our families are recent immigrant families and I don't know that when they walk in the door they even necessarily know that there is a charter or a regular public school or that there's even a competition if there is one or that there is a controversy. What they know is that they heard they can come to this school and that there is a variety of services available to them, and most importantly, that their kids are going to leave the school with great level of proficiency and prepared to make the move into high school and then into whatever else they want to do next, which would be college or whatever else.

I don't think that we're necessarily targeting a group or serving our local community.

MR. FARIAS: In Houston, the Latino population in the Houston School District is 60 percent. So you can go anywhere in Houston and you're going to have a high percentage of Latinos. I don't care where you go.

In the East End, which is where we're at, the Latino population of that area is like 97 percent. And the population in my school is 99 percent Latino because I'm in a Latino neighborhood, okay? The boundaries of our school are within 13 zip codes, with the Raul Yzaguirre School being that center of the 13. So that whole area is 150,000 people of which 97 percent of them are Latino. So it makes sense if that's the kind of piece that we're going to get.

Now, as an open enrollment charter school, we get all kinds of kids, the kids that are bilingual, kids that are monolingual in English and/or Spanish. And we get kids – obviously primary Latino. We get kids that are in trouble. We get all kinds of kids. And the beauty about charter schools is that we are capping in terms of the numbers that we can take in. Nine hundred and fifty kids now is the most I can get. I have a waiting list of more than 400 for the last five years. And so that keeps – that doesn't change. I added 300 more kids this past year and a half and I still have a waiting list of 400. So there's a definite desire for families wanting to put their children in a smaller, safer, more secure setting. And I think that because of the success we have had academically, then that makes it even much more enticing. But the bottom line is that families want their children safe. And that's one of the most important things that we look, obviously besides academics, that we must do for these children and these families.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. Peter, do you want to add more?

MR. GROFF: There's not much I can add because I think what you heard is that a lot of it has to do with housing patterns and demographics and areas of services. And so many of our schools are in urban areas, but we also have about 19 percent of charters that are in rural areas that also reflect that area of service as well.

And so parents are making the choice based on safety, based on academics, based on where they feel their child is going to be able to achieve. So at one point early on in the movement, there was serve enough children of color. Now, we serve too many children of color. So I am not really sure what the argument is there, but a lot of it has to do with those opponents who just don't like charter schools and are able to throw whatever kind of comes to their mind. But it really is based on the area of service and where those schools are located.

MS. LAZARIN: It doesn't look very different from the traditional public school down the street.

MR. FARIAS: But you know what? Having been in the charter school movement since 1996, I've seen a tremendous change for the better. In Houston alone, principals were being told by their superintendent not engage in any way with charter schools. That has completely changed now. We've had several superintendents since then in the school system, but the attitude is much more positive. There's a lot of – as a matter of fact, even the school districts are starting their own campus charter schools now. So there's – it's a very positive turn that has happened in Houston. We're still not where we need to be, but a lot of good things are happening now in terms of working with each other.

MS. LAZARIN: Right. Monique, what about – you have a high percentage of ELLs. And your school's dual language program somewhat thrives on the linguistic makeup of your students. What kind of recruitment strategies or enrollment policies do you use that can sort of support the model that you're already using in your school.

MS. DAVISS: We are an open enrollment school. We do attract – dual language tries to have language models, so the idea is that you have as many English speaking kids as you have Spanish speaking kids, but that doesn't turn out to necessarily be completely even for us. We tend – we serve more Spanish language kids than we do English language students primarily because we can't control for that. We can't say only – 50 percent of the kids have to be English language only and 50 percent are going to be Spanish language students. So because our enrollment reflects in many ways our local community, we tend to get more Spanish speakers than we do English only, although we do have English only students. And there's a whole another language lesson involved there, when the parents of English only students enter – their children enter kindergarten, 90 percent today in Spanish and it is the lesson in opposite. So for all of those parents whose children only speak Spanish and the family speaks Spanish and they go into this traditional immersion setting and everybody's kind of freaked out, they have – the English speaking parents have this opposite experience in kinder and there's a little bit of panic that's going on probably today – schools started Monday – where the English only parents are likely “was this a really good idea? I'm not sure.” But the amazing thing about language is that these five and six year olds begin to pick up Spanish really quickly. They make the transfer and then they have a language proficiency in two languages, in both English and Spanish.

So we do a lottery. We have a waiting list. We have people who line up in February. They do a registration. They get stamped in. Then we do the lottery. And then the waiting list is developed based on where they stamped in. So the earliest stamp is number one et cetera. We do a lottery for our preschool and for our kinder. After that it's just based on space availability and a general waiting list if you want to come in first or second or third or whatever.

MS. LAZARIN: Another criticism that I've heard for schools, charter schools that do serve English language learners or even when they do that they're targeting or they happen to have an ELL population that is really at the brink of English proficiency. So you might not be – or the ELL students that we're seeing in charter schools today may not be those that are at the lowest levels of English language proficiency. In your experience, what's your perspective of that?

MR. FARIAS: At our school, about 40 percent of the kids that come in at the primary level are English language learners. And once we get to the higher grades, then those numbers decrease because we're growing our students. And by the way, that's one of the best models, I think, that any charter school could have is have a full PreK-12 because you grow your students. You're able to maintain control. You're able to keep up with their progress and you're able to give them the additional assistance they need when they need it. And it's a win-win for everybody, especially for the family who – many of our families have two or three different kids in a school. If they can have one at one campus, it's so much easier for the family as well. So there is a lot of positive reasons why you want to have a PreK-12 so long as you maintain the necessary autonomy between the primary, the junior, and the high school, which we're able to do because even though we have one campus, we actually have three different buildings and

each campus – each academy has its own principal and set of teachers. And so as long as autonomy is maintained, it's a very positive thing.

There was a lot of concern in the beginning that the older kids would take advantage of the younger kids. That in 15 years that has never been the case. So it's – so I really suggest that people look at that.

MS. LAZARIN: Peter is your organization advocating or recommending, when you talk to charter schools or charter state advocates, any things that they should think about in changing their laws or improving their policies or schools, what they can be doing to make sure they're reaching out to the broadest population of students as possible?

MR. GROFF: One of the recommendations that came out of your study, based I think on the work that these schools are doing in terms of enrollment and recruitment and being able to show at the applicant stage that you're going to have a program that is going to be beneficial to ELL students, that is part of the language of a model law that the alliance put together a couple of years ago and that we're now kind of passing across the country. And we're also, at our state level, with our state advocacy work, and Todd Ziebarth and the great work he's doing for us around the country, trying to strengthen some of the charter laws that are out there.

So certainly that issue of enrollment and recruitment and the issue of funding and facilities and some of the other recommendations and concerns that came out of your study are things that we're working on.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. I want to turn a little bit more to the role of charter autonomy and particularly around native language instruction. Monique, your school prominently features a dual language program, and it also is in a state that has banned the use of native language instruction. Can you talk a little bit how your school operates in that landscape and sort of how parents have reacted to or sort of see it as an option given maybe the limited offerings that might be elsewhere?

MS. DAVISS: Dual language is an important feature of our school. But there are different reasons why people come to El Sol. Some of them come for the music. Some of them come for the dance or the art. Some of them come because you can get all of these other wraparound services.

For those parents who come because of the dual language program, they're probably a couple of different types. One is the recent immigrant parent who wants to be able to participate in the education of their children, so they can help with the homework. They can understand what's going on. They can fully participate in conversations with the teachers and the staff. And it's a language environment that they feel comfortable in.

There's another set of parents who see the dual language as a potential long-term asset for their children with regards to being able to operate in a more global society. And now they have this additional language asset that they take with them.

We don't – so we actually have the children of teachers from the local district, who bring their children to our school because they can get the dual language program at our school and they can't get it somewhere else.

It's not necessarily that we're offering it as a way to serve English language learners only. It happens to support that and we have a lot of success with it. But we're offering it as a whole piece for a lot of different audiences.

MS. LAZARIN: Can you touch on the ability of charter schools to be a unique delivery system for English language instruction given their autonomy that they have.

MR. GROFF: Well, the autonomy allows the innovation in a classroom that will allow teachers to be unique in delivering, whether it's math or science or dual language or what have you. But the barriers that state statutes have certainly kind of piled on to teachers and to public education is stripped away with the charter. And so that ability, that flexibility we certainly have seen across the country is helping to drive achievement for students of color, particularly for ELL students because of the unique way that you have to deal with the language and the culture that they're bringing in the classroom. So that autonomy is critical. And one of the things that we are on watch for both at the federal and state level is potential regulatory rollbacks on that autonomy. And so we need to make sure that the autonomist nature of charter schools is there.

And so we don't want to begin to see some new regulations and statutes piled on top of charters because that weakens the unique ability that you're hearing about today from these schools in terms of delivering a unique service to students that's in their best educational interest.

MR. FARIAS: I think that creativity and innovation are the hallmarks of charter schools. And so to do anything that would dampen that spirit would be ruining the charter school movement because that's what charter schools are all about. It is so clear after all these years, 100 years, the public school system has been failing so many of our kids, and for the first time we, as a community, actually do something about it besides cry about it. And so that's just such an important piece about charter schools. We need to keep it up there.

MS. LAZARIN: Yes.

MS. DAVISS: I do want to say that one of the things that happens for us, just in terms of accountability, is – and relationship to our model – is that in California, standardized testing begins in second grade. So our students have not begun formal English language instruction. Twenty percent of their day is in English. It's part of the model. But they have to take the standardized tests in English in second grade. And our

school as a whole, both at the state and federal level, is held accountable to the outcomes for our students.

So in terms of how does our model come up against the challenges of the larger – some of the regulations, that’s where we see it with regard to accountability. But that just means that we work that much harder when the kids make the transition. And they make huge leaps. And we can demonstrate in the longer term that our kids are making strong academic progress. But it puts a lot of pressure on the model early on because in second grade, they’re testing in a language they haven’t had formal instruction in. So the outcomes are a little shaky.

Ours actually, they end up performing at or above the local school’s anyway, but it still puts a lot of pressure on the system.

MS. LAZARIN: What about Title III funding, Peter, and even really access to state and federal dollars for charter schools? In the report, we discuss how some states have – how charters in some states have found it challenging to access their share of Title III funding. What kind of – what’s your organization doing? What would you recommend?

MR. GROFF: Well, I think it’s beyond the Title III funding –

MS. LAZARIN: Yes.

MR. GROFF: – it’s really kind of all strings go to the federal and state level. And what is unique, I think, is that the sector itself is less than 20 years old. And so we’re still trying to deal with some of the kinks and bugs of a new delivery system, a new education delivery system. And so at the federal level, we’re certainly working with the administration on maybe their idea to make sure that some of these funds are done at a competitive grant. I know that makes some people uncomfortable. But I think when you’ve look at Race to the Top, you looked at Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods, which should be coming out here pretty quickly, that new dollars ought to be going to those folks who are knocking it out of the park, whether they’re in Santa Ana, whether they’re in Houston, whether they’re in Denver or other places. and then we also need to try and figure out what we’re going to do with those low performing schools as well.

But what is unique is that each state has its own set of statutes in terms of how that money is delivered. Some states make charters an LEA, local education agency, some don’t. some have hybrids of that. So there might be some guidance from the federal level to help, but we don’t want to mandate it because the second we begin to mandate things, certainly from down the street here, begins to pinch on the innovation and flexibility of states and schools. And so we’re still trying to deal with what’s the best way to get money to those institutions that are doing a good job.

MS. LAZARIN: Okay. Let's me see. I'm wondering – let me turn to the audience. We have a full half hour still. So I think we can get to a lot of questions. Okay, yes. There are questions. I see this woman here at the front. Actually – yes, go ahead.

Q: Hi, I'm Mary Ann Stein with the Moriah Fund and have been involved in creating a program in schools in Israel that have concentrations, high concentrations of Ethiopian children, who obviously are not Spanish speakers, but they are not speakers of the language there. And I'm very curious to know a number of things from you. You've talked about afterschool programs and the importance of that. To what extent do you see summer as an issue? I don't know whether you all read it, but Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers* – I think he overstated it, but I think it is a big issue that one of the big differences between low-income children and middle-income children is the amount of stimulation and learning that take place over the summer. And many kids just lose a lot. So I'm sort of interested in what you think about that. And I'd be very interested in hearing more about the in-classroom kinds of things in terms of the amount of time that's spent on literacy, the individualization of teaching, any models of teaching approaches – balanced literacy, workshop models, whatever that you find particularly effective or the degree to which you think those things are important. We certainly are seeing that.

And another thing that you haven't mentioned is unions, whether any of your schools do have to deal with unions and obviously seems to me that this is an important issue now in terms of the transferability of what you are learning and modeling in your schools and the ability to help turn around other schools, particularly non-charter public schools.

MS. LAZARIN: A lot of questions in there. (Laughter.) Who wants to tackle that?

MR. FARIAS: I'll take the first part about summer school or about summer activities. We, too, believe that that's very important, so we actually have a summer school program throughout. It's not a required piece, but – except for those kids that do have to go to summer school, but we have enrichment activities throughout the summer so that kids are – continue to get involved and motivated and out of trouble. And we're able to keep it open just like as it was a regular school day.

Q: Do you – I'm sorry, but you do have – (off mike).

MR. FARIAS: We know who they are that are in the programs and sometimes we do encourage some that may not come to join us as well and get the parents involved. And definitely we have the parents involved during the summer as well. So we have a lot of cultural type of activities that drove the parents in as well. So that's a real part of the key.

I wanted to say something about the union piece. And I am proud to say that it was the Teachers' Union president of Houston – for Houston Federation of Teachers that

actually helped me start my charter school, in spite of the fact that the union at that time was not too crazy about charter schools. But even that has changed and actually she has served on my board. And we – she did bring her representative and initially a lot of my teachers signed up for it, which was okay. However, now that we've grown and we have more like 60 or 70 teachers, we only have like five or six that are still enrolled because they don't see the need for it because one other thing – while we demand a lot of our teachers, we also do everything we can for our teachers. And you have to balance that and you have to keep them happy. And as long as the teachers are happy, they don't feel like they need to be paying union dues.

MS. LAZARIN: Peter, it looked like you wanted to add something to that.

MR. GROFF: I just wanted to piggyback on what Richard said about the out of school programming. In the last job I had, we travelled the country, not only touting the president's education agenda, but also working with community based organizations and faith-based groups and districts to try and create a better relationship in not only districts but schools. And hopefully the schools would then open their doors. What I think is unique about charter schools is the control that you all have and that you can keep those doors open so that maybe community groups can come in and do programming. What we saw, as we travelled the country, was that there were great community based programs or even faith-based programs out there, but it didn't match what the students were learning in the school. And so the teachers were saying "these programs are great, but they're not teaching them the same way we are, even sometimes in the same subject that we are, so students kind of get lost."

And so to really build on what they're learning in the classroom, I would hope that charters would open up those buildings and have those community groups come in and actually hold the programs there, work with the teachers to make sure that what's being delivered after school is supplementing what's going on during the school hours. And I think that strengthens not only the out of school program, but what the students are learning and again raising achievement.

MS. LAZARIN: Great.

MS. DAVISS: Well, that's actually what we do. We don't use an outside provider, but we have our teachers who work in the extended day – instructors who work in the extended day. They also do some time in the classroom during the day so that they can – the teachers can model the work that they're doing with students and – so then the day time teachers work with the extended day instructors. They make a lesson plan together that reflects what's going on in the classroom that day. And then they're using data to constantly move that lesson along. So what's going on from 3:00 to 6:00 is directly aligned to what's going on from 8:00 to 3:00. And they are – and then they're constantly moving these kids into groups. And so that's what we did in the summer. We actually – we've had summer programs before. This summer, we said, "if you are at this – if you are not proficient advanced, you have to come to summer school." And then we had teachers who – we had four teachers who worked with our extended day staff who

did the summer program. They did five weeks all day, four days a week. And they worked on those language skills and/or math skills or Spanish language skills. It was full summer school and it was aligned to the expectations of where they should have ended the year to prepare them to go to the next year.

So we're constantly – and we have data on all that. We're constantly – we're taking where are they now, where will they be next time, how does this look different from that, what is – charts and graphs and numbers and we're relating all of that so that we can – so that we can use that information to make good decisions, both about a whole class or a group of students or an individual student. So our data is not only how did they do on the entire test, but where were the common things that they didn't understand so that we can teach to that. And that's going on constantly.

We do not have a union. But we have 95 percent retention of our teachers. Once they come, they stay. Even though we do expect a lot from them. Most of them come young, so they don't know any better – (laughter). So we just – that's not true. People who believe in the mission and we're a mission driven organization and it just functions like that.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. Can I –

Q: (Off mike.)

MS. LAZARIN: – let me actually get to a few because I see a lot of hands up. And let me ask if there is any press in the room, if you have any question. I don't know if we do. Press? Okay. So let me go – if you can introduce yourself, too.

Q: Good morning. My name is Jamal, Jamal Abdul-Alim, a reporter for diverse issues in higher education. We've seen increased discussion from the current administration about increasing college degree attainment, such that by the year 2020 the goal is to have – the United States have the most college educated population in the world. My question is what do we know about the degree to which students who have had the charter school experience are enrolling in and completing a college in comparison to public school students? And I guess part of the broader context for that question is charter schools were started, many of them with the premise that they could do a better job than public schools, but we don't really see a whole lot of evidence that that's necessarily the case. So when you answer the question, if you could address that as well. Thank you.

MR. GROFF: I'll take that and I'm going to let the other panelists jump on as well. Jamal, I think that the issue certainly that we've seen is that – again, this is a relatively young sector, but we know that after three years, the longer kids are in charter schools, certainly after that three-year period, the more likely they are to graduate, the more likely they are to go on to college. And so the longer these folks are able to keep them in their schools, we're seeing not only a rise in achievement, but a closing of the achievement gap in a lot of different areas. And you look at the work of charters in urban

areas. And I think a lot goes into the fact that the parents now have an option and they're making their choice and saying "I want my child to go to this charter school." And they begin to really buy and invest in what's going on in that school. That education then becomes heightened in – not only in the home, but in the community. And so I think we're seeing a lot of urban schools, not all of them, but certainly a lot of urban schools that are really driving achievement, doing much better than the traditional public school down the street.

MR. FARIAS: If I could just add, to Houston and our school – and I'm glad you asked the question because I'll have to talk about the reality, our reality, that we have less than 2 percent dropout rate for the last eight years that we've had a high school component. And this past year, we had zero percent dropout. I can explain why we had zero percent dropouts. But more importantly, 95 percent of our graduates go on to college.

I cannot tell you how many are actually getting their diplomas yet because we don't have the capacity to track them, but we do know that they are enrolling in college and many of them are coming back to us. We have some of them working for us now. And it's really, I think, a beauty when you realize that these kids are actually being successful and moving on.

So it is definitely happening at that level. But I think every state really has to be looking at that. And you're right. Texas has been very active about shutting down charter schools that are not producing. And I don't know what's going on in other states, but if there's charter schools that are not doing any better than regular public schools are, then we need to do something with those. But the reality is, is that charter schools are still in their infancy as well. The school districts, more than 100 years old, and they're still failing a lot of our kids. So let's give this charter movement a chance to grow up. In the meantime, we cannot sacrifice kids for that, but I think it's worth our community coming together to help these charter schools because they really are very promising for the future.

MS. LAZARIN: What about the woman in the back standing up?

Q: Thank you. Hi. My name's Cecilia Calvo and I'm a consultant. I was very interested in sort of partnerships that you're talking about forming and how important that has been to sustaining your schools. And I'm curious about your relationships with your local Catholic diocese and whether they have been a referral network for you. Have they steered people to your schools? Do you find fluidity between kids who are enrolled in charter schools and kids who move on to the local parish school? What that relationship is like? Is it helpful or is it more of a challenging?

MS. DAVISS: We don't have a formal relationship with the archdiocese. There are some Catholic schools in the neighborhood and I think their focus is enriching those schools. In the current economic climate, from my understanding, there were Catholic schools that were struggling because parents could not continue to afford tuition. So their

focus has been there. We haven't necessarily benefited from that relationship, although we would be open to it. Our partnership – we have a larger partner network that has actually been facilitated through a foundation. There's a local foundation, the Merage Foundation, and a leader there who – their executive director, who's convened organizations together who have a public law center, legal aid, the community college, UCI Medical Center, Share Our Selves, which is a local free clinic, probably 15 to 20 organizations. And the foundation then supports the convening and dialogue and gets the conversation going and sustains and maintains the interest. And then – and facilitates the conversation. And then we actually all come together and allow for those organizations to provide services on our site. So.

MS. LAZARIN: Go to the left side of the room and this woman here in the second row. Sorry to make run over the room, Emma (sp).

Q: Hello. I'm Virginia Richardson and I've been working in the public schools for too long. And I've been working as a – (inaudible) – is the word, a teacher for some time. And I came to this meeting hoping to hear about two things. And I heard a lot of very heartening material. But I want to hear if you know anything about KIPP schools that are charter schools here in the district that have the best, quote, "test rate" of any charter schools here. And they're getting – they're growing in popularity and they have a lot to offer. I just wanted – I'd like to hear you say something about that and also about adult education as a community effort. Thanks.

MS. LAZARIN: (Off mike) – KIPP question.

MR. GROFF: I will. Certainly, Ms. Richardson, KIPP schools are seeing a great deal of success across the country. There's 99 schools now, so I guess about 2,000 or so students. And their model works. And they've grown that network in a responsible way. I was just at their conference in Las Vegas about a month or so ago. And they have a lot of young teachers, a lot of enthusiasm. And I think what was unique about their delivery system is they bring folks in and just like our independent, strong independent schools, there is a lot of buy in from their local administration and from their teachers. And they require a lot of them. And that goes on to the students. And I think in all charter schools you see that, whether it is a network of schools like that or strong independents like we have today, it's that buy in of the staff and of the community to help grow around that school and lift up that school. But certainly KIPP is a great model that they're looking to replicate and grow across the country.

MR. FARIAS: But I can tell you, too, that they've gotten obviously a lot of publicity. They obviously have grown a lot. They've mushroomed all over the country. I pray to God that they're able to continue their success. I'm a little concerned about that. But I work very closely with KIPP in Houston. As a matter of fact, they have come to Raul Yzaguirre School to learn more about how to engage parents. So we have a good collaboration going with them, very, very good system. I take issue with the fact that they're the best. (Laughter.) I am a little competitive, but they are very good. (Laughter.)

MS. LAZARIN: Great.

MS. DAVISS: For adult education, we have a huge adult education program, both formal through the community college who has classes on site during the week and on Saturdays, but we also are hoping to work with NCLR around strengthening our parent education piece, not just parent education in general, but as it relates to supporting educational outcomes for their kids. So being able to have an organized program that brings parents in and says – if the teacher says that your child needs help with fluency, what does that mean and what are some strategies that you can use around fluency? If the teacher says you need to take your child to the library more, what do you do when you get there? What is a leveled reader? What should you expect your child to walk away from? What are you supposed to leave with when you leave the library? Not because people don't know you leave the library with a book but because there are things that we know to look for. If you're in the third grade and you're at this reading level, you look for this kind of book and how do you read with them. How do you set up a reading corner? So there's all kinds of different parent education, both the formal kind and the kind that relates to how do you support what your child's doing in the classroom.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. If you could go to this man with the tie. Sorry.

Q: Thank you. First, let me thank all of you for what you're doing for education. It's so important. I'm Hank Zimon from L-3 Communications. And I have to go to unions one more time because I was personally involved in leading an effort to establish a bilingual charter school in Redding, Pennsylvania, a few years ago in partnership with our community college president. And in spite of the fact that Pennsylvania supports charter schools and we had the personal interventions of our secretary of education, we were slam-dunked by the Teachers' Union, both at the state level and at the national level. And after two years of trying, we had to drop the whole initiative. And we were told that the national policy of the teachers' unions is to oppose charter schools. So I just wondered if you had addressed that at all in the study. If that's true – I don't know if that's true for a fact. And we heard some of the success stories, of just keep on trying and demonstrate success, and maybe they'll finally cooperate, but if you haven't addressed it, I think it might be a major issue that needs to be a part of the charter schools study.

MS. LAZARIN: Okay. I don't know if anyone here wants to address that. I know we don't have anyone from the union up here, so – but I do know that AFT has really taken upon themselves. I know they've established some charter schools themselves. So my understanding is that there is a great deal of interest from the unions. And I don't know if anyone else has anything to add to that.

MR. GROFF: I think we hear a lot about the conversation that goes on in this town, the political conversation. But when you look at the corps of teachers, whether it's in your school or your school or other charter schools, we're talking about teachers who have made a choice to teach at a charter school, to start their career and potentially move

on throughout their career in a charter. And they've made that affirmative choice. At the alliance, we don't go one way or the other on charters, other than that – on unions other than if there's going to be union representation that we don't want it to pinch or infringe on the innovation and the flexibility. If they want to have a longer school day, if they want to go on weekends or go throughout the summer, go year around, whatever it might be, then they need to have the flexibility to do that. And when we've seen at least one state require that unions be part of the effort to grow charter schools, a pretty close state to D.C., and we've seen how that really has not allowed that sector to really grow and flourish there.

So we can talk about thin contracts and we can talk about negotiation, but at the end of the day teachers need to have flexibility in the classroom to do the things and to apply the mission that's been created by the leaders. And if that's fine and they're fine with that, then it's okay to bring that union into that school.

MS. LAZARIN: I think we have room for two more questions. Okay, let me go to the back, Bruno?

Q: Thanks. My name is Bruno Manno. I'm with the Walton Family Foundation. I'd like folks to get very specific about the financing situation that your schools confront. What is your per pupil cost? How much of that comes from public dollars, meaning local or state? What's the gap? How do you close the gap? How do you pay for your facilities? Where does that money come from? So to talk a little bit about the specifics of the financing of these schools.

MS. LAZARIN: Richard, do you want to start?

MR. FARIAS: Well, I can tell you that it takes more money than what we get. (Laughter.)

MS. DAVISS: I was going to say the same thing. (Laughter.)

MR. FARIAS: And it's been a real issue. Across the country, certainly in Texas, but across the country charter schools are underfunded compared to the regular school districts. What we do is we go after a lot of outside funding from foundations, from corporations. We have our own fundraisers. I have a person devoted to resource development so that we can bring in additional funds. And typically we're bringing close to a million dollars additional to help support what we're trying to do. And when we've taken the holistic approach that we have, with all kinds of different activities that we haven't even talked about today, that becomes a real key piece. But definitely if there's anything that the federal government should be doing is allocating funding for facilities because that's what's hurting the movement from going faster than what it has so far, and it's hard to exactly define how much we get per student because of the state funds and the federal funds and depending on how many kids you have that are low-income determines a lot how much you get from the federal government. And so it's real hard to pin down, but it's somewhere between \$8,500 and \$9,500 per kid.

Most schools are spending more like \$12,000 per kid. So you do the math. We've got 950 kids. That really brings the numbers down for us. And so we struggle. However – and as far as facilities, what we're having to do now is we're having to take some of that core money and use it for facilities instead for services for the students. And so that's what really hurts as well.

We just got a brand new facility that we just built. We're still building. But we obtained financing for it. And it's paid through the reimbursement that we get from the state.

MS. LAZARIN: Monique, do you want to add to that?

MS. DAVISS: Well, we're in California and if you've been following that situation at all, it's not just charter schools but it's all schools. We're probably at about \$1,000 less per pupil than we would have been if things – if the cuts hadn't been made in the last three years. So for a school like ours that has this year 620 K-8 students, the pre-K is funded totally separately through a foundation, that's over \$600,000 that we would have had in general operating costs, but we don't have now. And for a school, a small school like ours that represents a lot of opportunity for students that we can't tap right now.

We do also use foundations and other grants. And our school is humble in its appearance. The supply closet turns into the speech room which turns into the health assessment room which turns into the – it's like the card box thing. So we try to be – we have the same amount of administrators now that we had when this school had 200 kids. So there are things that we do without and we just take on more. Clearly that's not a sustainable model. So we have to look for other funds. But funding is a huge issue.

We are on a makeshift campus. We would – we are currently hoping to build a facility and trying to figure out how we're going to come up with those funds, whether it's through public bonds or private or some sort of mixed financing, but facilities financing is a big issue for us, as well as general operating educational expenses and the current situation in California is really bleak.

MS. LAZARIN: Peter, did you want to add to that.

MR. GROFF: I do. And Bruno, you've been involved in this movement for a long time, so that you know on average \$2,200 – that's per student across the country. It is absolutely immoral how we fund charter schools in this country. Not only do we put them in facilities that weren't made for schools and we say "here is less money than we're going to give a school down the street that isn't doing nearly as well as you are with the exact same students," and deal with that. So it is an issue that the alliance is working on.

Just recently, we released a report called “Housing a Growing Movement.” There’re four recommendations on the issue of facilities. We’re in the process now of beginning to implement those recommendations in those four areas. And funding is an area that we will and need to get to because when you look at the work that Richard and Monique are doing, to say, “here is a pot of money that we’re not going to give you that we’re going to give every other school” is absolutely wrong, particularly when you see the work that they’re doing. And you talk about the dropout rate was zero –

MR. FARIAS: Zero last year.

MR. GROFF: – last year. And the national average is way above zero. We need to be funding. And imagine how great these schools could be if they were funded at the exact same level and had the opportunity to be in a facility like – school facility like other public schools. And Richard was sharing with us his new project and they had to grow up because they couldn’t grow out. And they just have a certain amount of land that they need to deal with. So this really is kind of the moral pivot point of this effort in terms of funding and facilities. And National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is working on that issue.

MS. LAZARIN: So I regret that we’re at 10:30, but I really want to go and ask each of our panelists if they have any closing thoughts and then I would definitely invite you to please come up and talk to our panelists individually if you have additional questions. But let me start with Richard.

MR. FARIAS: But if I may just say, it’s really beyond the money and the facilities when it comes to charter schools. And really when it comes to public education, it should be about the kids. And sometimes the kids get lost in the shuffle because we have all these other issues going on. And so what’s really important to me is that I hire the best possible teachers for my kids, that they have the passion and the determination to make sure that each of our children will succeed in the classroom and ultimately become productive citizens of this country. But I don’t see enough of that in the regular public schools. And so I really think we need to get back to basics about making sure that we’re taking care of the needs of the child academically and not forget that they do not learn in a vacuum, so that we must also address the needs of the family that they come from and the community that they live in. And when you’re working with a whole community like we’re able to do in Houston, it really does make the whole community prosper. So it’s not just about the child. It’s not even just about the child and the family, which is so, so important, but it’s got to be about the whole community coming together and caring what happens to each and every child.

MS. LAZARIN: Thanks. Peter?

MR. GROFF: Thank you. Just very briefly I want to thank the Center for American Progress for pulling this together and helping to release this report. This is such a critical issue. National Council of La Raza for doing the great work they’re doing, when other communities and other organizations of color are not doing the right thing on

education issues, La Raza has stepped up and said, “this is a critical issue and we will deal with that.” And I appreciate their great work. What this report proves and what you’ve seen on this stage is that charter schools are working. Charter schools are raising achievement. They’re closing the achievement gap. Partnerships between teachers and parents and community, to build schools, to deliver a system that’s in the best educational interest of children and do it in a public school system that has failed so many of our children, particularly children of color.

When you look at the great work that’s going on in Houston and Santa Ana, California, you can now see that those kids will grow up perfectly prepared for the global economy that they’re going to be going into. And what’s going to be unique about these students is that they’re going to be able to converse in a variety of different languages in this global economy and really their knowledge and their intellect is going to be the trade of the day. And so I want to just congratulate these folks on the great work that they are doing. And the alliance stands ready to help you on your missions.

MS. LAZARIN: Monique?

MS. DAVISS: I think that we take – at El Sol, we take our mission as a real responsibility. And we had our staff development last week and so we shared with the teachers that we’re still enrolling some people in grades as space becomes available. And one of the last people that we let in, we told the mother, “okay, your child can get in now,” and she started crying. And I said to the staff, “this is a huge responsibility.” People are sharing with us their hopes and dreams for their children. And so everything that we can do to respond to that and contribute to that and make an impact for that student, that family, and as already been said, the entire community, then we will have done our job. And so we’re proud of that as an individual school and we’re proud of that as part of a movement and that’s –

MS. LAZARIN: Thank you. Thank you all for being here. And I know that there’s a lot of people that, I think, still want to talk to you, guys. So if you guys don’t mind sticking around for just a couple of minutes. I thank you all very much. (Applause.)

(END)