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The face of school choice empowers parents with options for kids



A little more than 10 years ago, a young woman named Denisha was part of a vicious cycle. Her mother dropped out of school, her uncle had dropped out of school and her brother would go on to drop out of school. At an early age, Denisha was already showing signs of trouble - getting into fights, being sent home from school. These were all signs that she would become part of a cycle many of us know too well.

But, that cycle was broken when Denisha's grandmother enrolled her in a private school with more structure, more attention paid to individual students, and mentors to lead her along a new path.

Denisha's educational opportunity was made a reality as a result of an educational choice program in Florida, one of more than 42 programs across the country in 19 states. Today, she's not only one of the few from her family to graduate high school, but she's the very first family member to ever graduate from college.

"If it weren't for the scholarship or for the school, you would probably meet me on a corner with a baby trying to make ends-meet," said Denisha.

But, Denisha's story is but one of literally hundreds of thousands of stories taking place right now in

classrooms across the country. Sadly too many parents do not realize there are literally millions of opportunities available to send their child to a private school of their choice. Programs designed to help low-income families and children trapped in underperforming schools.

In Louisiana, Kodie, a student who described himself as being lost in his zoned school, did not have the attention he needed. When Kodie received a scholarship through Louisiana's educational choice program his attitude towards school and his education completely changed and he is now thriving. "The teacher can actually go one-on-one . . . That feeling of passing a grade is just really good, to know you won't be held back," said Kodie.

When I served on the DC City Council, like many parents, I was initially hesitant to support charter schools or school choice. I was raised to trust the traditional public school system, but I met too many families who were left hopeless because their children were zoned to failing schools and these families lacked the financial means to move or send their children to private school. That's when I realized we have to do more because no child should be denied the right to attend a quality school of their parents' choice.

We have seen the emerging success of school choice in Washington, D.C. where its opportunity scholarship program has a graduation rate of about 90 percent - compared to 50 percent in D.C. Public Schools. While there is success, we cannot rest until every parent across the country is empowered with a wide array of quality educational options for their children, ensuring their success throughout their education and beyond.