Testimony to the House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and distinguished committee members for inviting me to testify before the House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. I am pleased to represent KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) as well as parents, students, and teachers of KIPP Reach College Preparatory in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

I wanted to begin by describing my experience in education just prior to starting a KIPP School. In 2000, I was named Oklahoma's Vice Principal of the Year by the Oklahoma Association of Secondary School Principals. Looking for a challenge, I asked to be assigned principal for the 2000-2001 school year to one of Oklahoma's lowest performance middle schools, F.D. Moon Academy of Mass Media.

The school had been on the state's low performance list for two years. When I took over, the Oklahoma State Department of Education was prepared to shut it down or take it over if it made the list again. I became the third principal of F.D. Moon in five years. Amidst intense public scrutiny and criticism, we improved student achievement enough to get the school off the low-performing list.

While I was able to get the school off the low-performing list by the end of the first year, I felt stifled in the traditional public school system. If I was going to turn underachievers into overachievers, I needed freedom from bureaucratic roadblocks and red tape. Regulations prevented me from offering an extended school day, week, and year. While there were many dedicated teachers at the school, not all were willing to work long hours or truly believed that all students could achieve to high standards.

In 2001, Superintendent Bill Weitzel asked if I wanted to apply for the KIPP School Leadership Program and bring the first KIPP middle school to Oklahoma City. Established in 2000 through a generous grant from Gap, Inc. cofounders Doris and Donald Fisher, the non-profit KIPP Foundation recruits, trains, and supports educators to open and operate high performing public schools. When accepted into the highly rigorous program in the spring of 2001, I immediately jumped at the opportunity.

I had already heard about KIPP prior to my conversation with the Superintendent. In 1999, I saw the 60 Minutes segment on KIPP. The segment shines a spotlight on the successful program that Teach For America alumni Dave Levin and Mike Feinberg developed ten years ago in Houston, Texas and later expanded to New York City. KIPP gives leaders the autonomy to build a public school of excellence one grade at a time. As

a KIPP principal, I have the freedom to set the budget, to hire teachers, and to organize the school day.

I gained a great deal of knowledge during the year long KIPP School Leadership Program. The KSLP began with six weeks of courses at the University of California's Haas School of Business in Berkeley, where I learned how business skills could be applied to education. I was introduced to practical skills such as developing a budget for a start-up school, and exposed to elements of organizational culture found in successful businesses.

Following the coursework at the Haas Business School, I also spend two month-long residencies at the original KIPP Academies in Houston and New York. While at KIPP Academy Houston, I observed that "no shortcuts" was not just a slogan, but a guiding principle. Teachers were available not only from 7:30 to 5:00 for kids, but also took cell phone calls at night. At KIPP Academy New York, I was impressed by the school's award-winning rhythm and string orchestra. The experience inspired me to offer students various creative extracurricular programs in the afternoon and on weekends, such as a show choir and a dance club.

Starting in January of 2002, I returned home to Oklahoma City to begin building the school of my dreams from the ground up. I was especially pleased that this KIPP School would be located in the Northeast section of the city, where my ties to the community run deep. I was born three blocks from the Dunbar Elementary School where my school is housed. My dad, two siblings, and I all attended Dunbar. In addition, I spent most of my professional career teaching in Northeast, a federal empowerment zone.

KIPP Reach opened its doors to its first class of fifth graders in June of 2002**.** By 2005, it will evolve into a school comprised of approximately 300 students in grades five through eight. This incremental and deliberate growth pattern will be essential to the school's success. KIPP Reach exists as a district 'Enterprise' or contract school, giving it the autonomy of a charter school within the Oklahoma City Public School District.

The mission of KIPP Reach is to assist underserved students in developing the knowledge, skills, and character necessary for success in high quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond as they become productive members of society. Armed with these skills and achievements, the students of KIPP Reach will learn that a college education opens doors of opportunity in the future. This mission is not easily accomplished; KIPP Reach students learn that *there are no shortcuts* to success.

Similar to all KIPP schools, KIPP Reach is an open enrollment public school that does not discriminate based on background, behavior, or socioeconomic status. If more students apply than space is available, we hold a lottery to determine admission. To ensure that our school fulfills its mission, I target my recruiting in the low income Northeast community. As a result, more than 75 percent of students qualify for the federal free- or reduced-priced meals program,

In its first year, KIPP Reach students outperformed the Oklahoma City Public Schools' average scores in all seven core academic subjects. In the spring of 2003, KIPP Reach had 87 percent of its fifth graders scoring advanced or satisfactory in math, and 66 percent in reading on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test, compared to city averages of 54 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Only four of the 63 public schools in Oklahoma City outperformed KIPP Reach on both the state exam for reading and mathematics. The schools that outperformed KIPP Reach either offer selective admissions or serve predominantly affluent students.

KIPP Reach achieves these results by offering a demanding and rigorous academic curriculum. For example, the English department offers academically rich curricula. Each student at KIPP Reach reads at least 10 novels per year and is allotted at least 30 minutes of reading time each day. The school's reading and writing teachers attend workshops to further their expertise, and to expand their ability to address the unique needs of each student from an educationally disadvantaged neighborhood. The faculty is adept at accommodating the different learning styles and language barriers of the student body.

KIPP Reach seeks to develop excellent teachers so that they are professionally stimulated and actively engaged in the learning process. This engagement helps teachers stay focused and motivated, and strengthens their commitment to KIPP Reach and the historically underserved students they teach. Moreover, the quality of classroom instruction is integrally tied to student achievement. Effective professional development strengthens teaching and ensures that students are prepared to gain admissions and thrive in the nation's best college preparatory high schools and colleges.

With funding provided in FY2004 through the Fund for Improvement in Education, Congress provided funds needed to fulfill the mission of the KIPP School Leadership Program. We are not just preparing students for success in college, but also training them to be leaders of their generation. The federal dollars will help fund a trip to Washington, D.C and other sites across the country. This May, KIPP Reach students will visit the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Smithsonian, the White House, and a variety of historical monuments in Washington, DC. They will learn about the historical significance of these monuments and institutions, and will be able to witness in person the concepts and landmarks they have studied throughout 5th grade social studies.

We are not only opening doors of opportunity for kids, but also creating a ripple effect in the larger public school system. The success of KIPP Reach eliminates excuses, and serves as an example of the possible in public education.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for your time and consideration.