



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *107th* CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2001

Senate

BETTER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ACT

Mr. CARPER. Madam President, let me express my thanks to the chairman, the Senator from Massachusetts, for his support and for his words.

I have said on the floor before and I say it again today: We all acknowledge, the role of the Federal Government is not to run our schools, the role of the Federal Government is to try to level the playing field at least a little bit for kids who come, in some cases, from hopelessly disadvantaged backgrounds. The appropriate role of the Federal Government is to help identify what is working to raise student achievement across the country.

An appropriate role for the Federal Government is, when we do identify those things that are working, to encourage them. We nurture those ideas. We try to share those ideas with others around the country.

I remember when I was Governor of Delaware, about 5 years ago we were debating public school choice. I had just signed, as Governor, public school choice into law. I remember overhearing a conversation between a couple of school administrators. They didn't know I was listening, but I was.

I heard one administrator say to the other: If we don't offer parents what they want for their children in our public schools, their children will go to another school where they are offering what they want for their children. I said to myself at the time: He's got it. Because in Delaware and other places

where we have public school choice, particularly when you provide help on the transportation side so that it is really meaningful, if a student in school A isn't getting what they want or their parents want for them, they can go to school B. The transportation is provided for, and the money follows the students.

That is a really important concept. The money follows the student. In our State, the State provides anywhere from \$6,000 to \$7,000 per student for their education. When one child goes from school A to school B, the \$6,000 or \$7,000 follows that student. If one student moves from school A to school B, not many people are going to take notice of that. If 10 students move from school A to school B, that is 10 times \$6,000 or \$7,000, which is \$60,000 or \$70,000. Maybe somebody will notice that. If 100 students move from school A to school B because they are offering something school A is not offering, somebody is going to notice that certainly; they are certainly going to notice it in school A. The question they began to ask in my State was: What are they offering there that we are not offering? Maybe we ought to offer it as well.

It is the very best thing to come out of competition and out of the market forces we have introduced. Let me also add that I have always believed that the role of government, and particularly the Federal Government, in education is not to row the boat. The role of the Federal Government is maybe to help

steer the boat. The Federal Government provides less than 10 percent of the resources for the education of our children. States provide much more. In Delaware, it is 70 percent. Nationally, I think it is about 50 percent. The rest comes from local property taxes.

But if we in this body, in this Capitol, in our role as the Federal Government—certainly the legislative side of it—if we can help identify those things that work and if we can nurture them and help steer and not row the boat, our kids, in a lot of places, with relatively modest investments, are going to end up with a better education and

be better prepared to go on and face the world with the skills they will need to be successful in college and in work and in life.

Senator Kennedy said this is a modest but useful amendment. I think it is going to prove even more useful than we dare to hope today. If it is adopted and ends up in the final bill that goes to the President, we will have a chance to test that premise. I sincerely hope we do.

Again, to Senator Gregg, and to others who joined us in cosponsoring the original bill which underlies the amendment, and this amendment itself, I express my thanks.