



How Education Choice is Helping My Family Achieve The American Dream

Hera Varmah

My journey is a testament to the power of school choice in achieving the American dream. I am one of 12 siblings born into an immigrant family from Liberia and the Caribbean. Thus far, my three elder brothers have completed their college journeys: one is a mechanical engineer at a Tampa-based firm, another is pursuing a medical degree, and

the third is thriving as a chemical engineer at GE Healthcare in South Carolina. Our family's pursuit of education doesn't stop there—this year, six of my siblings are attending six different universities, with two more still in high school. After obtaining my bachelor's degree in food science and technology from Florida A&M University, I now work full-time in education policy,

dedicated to enabling other students to access the same life-changing opportunities that transformed my own family. Every one of us is well on our way to building fulfilling careers and forging successful lives. Without school choice, our story could have been very different.

My parents immigrated to the United States in search of better opportunities. As my siblings and I grew up, they worked tirelessly to provide us with the best education possible—one that aligned with our family's values and set us up for success in our adopted country. My parents believed that hard work, coupled with a strong moral foundation, makes education powerful. However, budgets were a challenge for our large family, and the local district schools were not the best fit for all of us. Simply put, our family's success would not have been possible without school choice.

Growing up with eleven siblings in one house was challenging, but we were determined. My parents instilled in us from an early age that odds are meant to be broken. Failure was not an option. This foundation ignited a fire within us to defy the odds. Thanks to the Florida tax-credit scholarship program, we found schools that met our unique learning needs and allowed our dreams to become reality. This scholarship provided opportunities for my siblings and me that simply would not have existed otherwise.

Without my parents' ability to choose the schools we attended, we would not be where we are today. Nine out of the twelve siblings benefited from the Florida tax-credit scholarship. So, when people say that school choice doesn't work, I simply

point to my family.

School choice is not a complex concept; it represents a crucial opportunity that countless families need. My family exemplifies the potential that school choice can unlock. My mission is to ensure that my journey is not a rare anomaly but rather a daily occurrence in the lives of families across the nation.

The idea of families, even those with limited means, being able to choose the right education for their children may seem like an impossible dream to many. For me, it was a given, though I didn't always realize how fortunate my family was.

During my college years, I participated in the Future Leaders Fellowship with the American Federation for Children, which opened my eyes to many realities. The Future Leaders Fellowship Program brings together college students from across the country who have benefited from school choice programs. We share common experiences, often coming from diverse yet impoverished backgrounds, each having found the schools we needed to succeed thanks to school choice.

Through these conversations, I began to see how different my experiences were in Florida—where robust programs exist—compared to those in states that still limit choice. The sacrifices and trade-offs other families made were significant, but their love for their children drove them to do whatever it took to help them succeed. Learning these stories inspired me to work towards a better future for families like mine across America and helped me realize my calling in public policy.

My experience is not unique; many of

my fellow Future Leaders have discovered a similar commitment to making a difference. As college students and now graduates, we come from humble beginnings and have had the opportunity to engage with national leaders, legislators, and advocates. We understand our power and are prepared to embrace the future.

Actor Denzel Washington once said, “Don’t just aspire to make a living; aspire to make a difference.” Today, thanks to school choice, I don’t just aspire to make a difference—I know I am making one.

Across the country, I have testified before state legislators, participated in panels, and spoken with families like mine about educational opportunities. Each state and community is unique, but one thing unites families from coast to coast: they want the best for their children. Unfortunately, too many families cannot fully realize this goal because they cannot afford to move to a school district that meets their needs or

pay for private tuition. Just as my parents stopped at nothing to give my siblings and me a better education, I have dedicated my career to doing the same for families across the country, ensuring their hopes and dreams do not depend on luck or family circumstances.

In conclusion, my family’s journey is a testament to the transformational impact of school choice. It serves as a beacon of hope for families striving for a better future. School choice has opened doors and empowered us to reach our fullest potential.

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