

Testimony of Victoria Torres

My name is Victoria Torres. I have two children. I live in Minneapolis. I come representing my community, asking that transparent school ratings be made available and distributed, clarifying their services to the different communities, in abbreviated form, understandable, and above all in Spanish; and that it becomes available on the website of the schools; and that parents know that they have the right to choose the school for their children.

I say this from my own experience, as I was not allowed to chose the school of my son. He went from school to school--and almost always the worst schools -- and that affected him to the point that he almost did not graduate from high school. Fortunately, now he is studying at MCTC.

The majority of times, or almost always, Latino children do not graduate because we, the parents, do not have clear and precise information, and we enroll our children in the schools that are assigned to us — which, generally speaking, are the worst schools. This is not just.

And just like students are evaluated, so should schools be rated. I support the proposal of school rating because that would be just for the families and their students. I consistently hear from my peers at work, at church, or those whom I know, that they are confused due to a lack of information.

Thank you for the opportunity to express myself here. I hope our voices are considered in the important decisions that you make – not only today but always, because even though you might not see this, you truly have the future of our children and a whole community in your hands.

Thank you very much.

Maria Cisneros Statement

Hi, my name is Maria Cisneros. I am thankful that my voice is allowed to be heard, as well as the voices of other families of color.

I come representing LYDC – Latino Youth Development Collaborative. We seek to promote the development of Latin youth; we talk to them about the rights they have to access quality education, we promote participation, leadership, and provide support to families and offer advocacy.

Today, I am here to talk about the sense of urgency we, as fathers and mothers, feel about knowing the ratings of our schools.

During the life of our children, as their protectors, we seek to always give them what is best, and this includes giving them the best tools in the school setting. We will only achieve this if we have the correct information coming through official means – but not any information. This information must be clear and understandable and must be available to all people. In programs like LYDC we are taught to navigate between the different school options, to seek which schools are the best positioned, and which will help increase the academic level of our children. However, in many cases, we find it very difficult to find this information, and when we do find it, it is only in English, and therefore not very useful for many families.

Another one of the barriers we come up against has to do with negative and poor practice of schools, which in many cases limits our rights to choose a school. We are told that schools are assigned to us based on the location we live in, when in reality this is neither true, nor should it be this way.

We demand that school ratings are public, understandable, and easy to access, that as parents we are able to see how each state school is rated, with a rating by population (Hispanic, White, Native American, etc.) and that this information be made available by

technological means, in printed form, and school bulletins, that this information be available in public places and those of greater public access.

If this is achieved it will be a way to force schools to continually improve, for the benefit of our sons and daughters.

Parents need to have tools, such as School Finder, that help us make choices between different school options, the best rated (qualified) schools, and [to inform us of] the academic levels by population. The information in this booklet should be clear and understandable.

The media suggests that Minnesota is one of the best states to live in, and its two main cities are multicultural cities. You are all here to oversee that the progress and quality of life of our state be maintained. Laws of the history of all of humanity and of all countries have been adapted and have evolved based on the necessities of their populations. Today this is an essential necessity.

You are all here with the responsibility that Minnesota continues to advance and continues to be a State of progress and opportunity. Now, you have in your hands the power to offer to each and every family the possibility of choosing a school of quality for their children. Let us all fulfill our responsibilities.

Thank you

Testimony of Perla Carranza

Good afternoon. My name is Perla Carranza. I have two children, a five-year-old son and a twelve-year-old daughter. I want to take this opportunity to let you know of some of the problems we face on a daily basis and that result in our children missing out on opportunities, falling behind academically. We, as parents, are the last to find out. For example: teachers do not talk to us honestly and clearly. By this I want to say that teachers do not communicate exactly how our children are doing in school. How can it be possible that children are graduated from their grade level, yet do not know anything? But on the day of the parent-teacher conference the teacher tells us, your child is doing very well, he socializes with other kids, does not participate much, but little by little is improving, and we leave happy as they tell us wonders about our children, while the reality is that the student is in 5th grade and does not know how to read and does not know how to divide [in math].

But, did the teachers not say that this was a good child [learning]? This is not acceptable. I have seen so many cases, such that I could stay here talking about this all day and night. How can it be possible that teachers are not worried about the education of their students? Clearly, they do not care.

I was a kindergarten teacher and my priority was that if ten children came into my class, all ten would leave it with the same knowledge. And, if one of them fell behind it was my duty, as their teacher, to try to help them and by the end of the academic year I felt proud of their progress and of my dedication. I believe that should be the job of every teacher.

We now need good teachers who are committed to education, who speak to us clearly whether our children have learned or have not learned, of how the teacher can support them, and how parents can help at home.

We need to improve our schools. We need to know the rating of the schools to know if the school is the appropriate one for our children. We need that if 100 children enter a

school, those 100 students graduate without a disparity based on the culture to which they belong. We all should have the same rights and opportunities, and also access to the best schools.

We need to be truly allowed to choose the school we believe is the best for our children and that they do not discriminate against us for not living in those neighborhoods. The schools that are being offered to us have a very low level and that is unacceptable. One of two [things]: Either we are allowed to choose [the school we send our children], or you do something so that those schools [we are assigned to] are of high level.

There are many problems in the schools and most of times no one has solutions. They just blame the children, or the parents. Very few people within the schools are responsible.

Based on everything I have previously stated, and for the things I cannot say due to a lack of time, I ask you to be responsible, and that you give a rating to all the schools, a rating that is easy to understand in our communities, so that we can make the best choices for our children.

Thank you for your attention.

Perla

Statement of Lizete Vega

Very good morning!!

My name is Lizete Vega

- I am here to support this proposal. I come to represent all the families that have sons and daughters in the public schools.
- We want transparency in the information that we receive from public schools.
- Generations of youth have been lost and not graduated because parents did not understand how to utilize the information that existed to support them to be successful.
- We want to be able to evaluate our children.
- How can it be possible that the parent portal does not have current information?
- We ask for clear and more understandable information from the schools so that parents get motivated to participate, and do not feel that the information that is there is indecipherable hieroglyphics.
- We want to support our sons (daughters) doing their homework.
- We want more information about schools that do provide a good education to their student body to make our decisions for the future of our children and for these decisions to be good ones.
- We ask to be informed whether our children are at grade level -- but in advance, before we are surprised to hear [they are not] in their 12th grade, when they are about

to complete that year, or in any moment when they are completing the academic year.

- We ask that public schools publish the school rating information in the mailings we already receive at home, online, or in a special pamphlet that has simplified, clear information about public schools that we can understand.
- Thank you for your attention; we are parents that are worried about the education of every child.
- I personally believe that each family will receive this information at a level that they will understand and that you will resolve this matter in a positive way, and make the best decision for the future of our children. Once more, thank you!!