

Remarks by Steve Barr, founder and Chairman, Green Dot Public Schools to the House Committee on Education and Labor, Hon. George Miller, Charmin. June 4 2009

Green Dot Public Schools, which I founded in 1999, currently has 18 small preparatory high schools--17 serving the highest need areas in Los Angeles and 1 in the South Bronx. Currently we serve about 7500 students. We go into areas where there are 60 to 70 percent dropout rates and we retain and graduate over 80% of those same kids with the same dollars. And nearly 80% of *our graduates* are accepted right out of our schools to 4-year universities. And those are areas, I might add, where maybe 4% of the kids graduate from college

Our role as a charter school organization is two fold—We serve our students and their families with everything we have. And secondly we should be looked at as Research and Development. And the result of the R&D of Green Dot is clear-cut across the board—and that's that African American kids and Latino kids can learn when they're in a system of schools that are small, are college and work ready, the dollars get in the classroom, there's support for our product (which is teaching), we're accountable to parents and we ask parents to be involved. In that vision, we think it not only serves our ultimate stakeholders—which are the students—but also teachers. Green Dot has its own teachers union. We're affiliated with the California Teachers Association and the NEA. We're also in a unique partnership in New York with the UFT and AFT and Randi Weingarten.

Our union contract instead of tenure has “just-cause” so there are protections. We have no minutes and hours in a workday, but a professional workday. And there's ultimate accountability; job stability is not just based on seniority but also on performance. We ask teachers to be more involved in decision-making and we pay more. \

Our Green Dot/UFT School in New York has total alignment between The Mayor, the chancellor, and the president of the teachers union. We receive \$12,000 per pupil and a free facility from the school district. With this kind of political alignment, the success of that school should be guaranteed.

The ultimate mission of Green Dot is systemic change. Two years ago, we enacted No Child Left Behind by getting the majority of the tenured teachers at Alain Locke High School in Watts to agree to a charter transformation. Locke represents 7 of our 18 schools in Los Angeles.

Locke High School was founded 40 years ago following the Watts Riots full of hope and promise. If you look at the statistics, Roughly 60,000 people have attended that high school during this time. Imagine if you could get all those people together. It would fill a pretty nice-sized stadium. If you got on the public address system and you say to those 60,000 people, “please leave the stadium if you didn’t graduate from Locke High School,” about 40,000 people would have to leave the stadium. Now you have 20,000 people left. Now if you got on the P.A. system and said to those people, “now leave the stadium if you didn’t get into a 4 year university.” Why is that important? Because we know that those people will make over a million dollars more in a life-time and will have the minimal requirements to maybe even come back and teach at that school. So, from 20,000 we’d now be down to only 8,000 left in the stadium where there once stood 60,000. If you said to them, “now step out of the stadium if you didn’t complete your bachelor’s degree,” all but 2100 people would have to leave. Now you only have 2100, maybe 2200 where there once stood 60,000 people. If you said, “Now please step out if you didn’t come back to your neighborhood and become a teacher, become politically active, start a business or a charter school,” Just a small handful of people would be left in the stadium. Taking into account the amazing work done by the clergy, gang intervention programs and non-profits, nothing will fix that neighborhood until you fix that school.

The problem with Los Angeles is that there are a lot of Locke High Schools and the problem with this country is that there are thousands of Locke High Schools. Until we collectively make this right, we will never heal our cities and right our economy.