

With the school year underway, it is a good time to reflect on the education system in our nation. A high quality education system is vital to ensuring our children and grandchildren can maintain America's strength and prosperity. Despite educators' best efforts to provide students with a quality education, there is a lot of concern among the public that the overall system needs major improvement. A recent poll by the Hoover Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, reveals that public assessment of our schools has fallen to the lowest recorded level since Americans were first asked to grade school performance in 1981. Only 18 percent of those polled gave schools an A or B, down from 30 percent in 2005. More Americans, 25 percent, gave schools an F or D. This poor public perception of our schools is a reflection of the actual data on student achievement. A recent national test of eighth grade students found that fewer than one in three were proficient in reading. The Department of Education reports that at least 25% of students fail to earn a high school diploma. High school graduation rates are lower than they were in 1970.

As a former member of my local school board, I'm sure that parents, teachers, and administrators agree that these nationwide results are not only concerning, but unacceptable. Unfortunately, policymakers' attempts to correct the problem have largely focused on increased education spending. Over the last three decades, government spending on education has dramatically increased to the point where we spend an average of \$10,000 annually for each student in public schools. And yet we have very little to show in terms of better results for our students. For example, math and reading scores of 17-year olds have been stagnant for four decades despite rising spending levels.

I believe we have the talent, resources, and ideas to significantly improve educational attainment for our students, but the system needs the proper incentives so that schools are allowed to innovate and challenge each other to provide the best quality education in the world. I believe one vital reform would be to increase competition in our school system by allowing parents to place their children in the public or private school of their choice. This authority, which has been deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court and implemented in our nation's capital, would motivate schools to make the changes necessary to bolster their performance. In addition, I believe that high performing teachers should be rewarded through incentive pay for running innovative and successful classrooms that ensure our children have the exceptional education they deserve.

Past experience has demonstrated that we will not increase students' educational attainment by throwing money at the system or instituting more federal mandates. In short, I believe improving education in America will be rooted in bolstering parental control and encouraging individual schools and local education authorities to make bold and innovative reforms.

