



Public education only barrier between U.S. and mediocrity

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The next time you feel the urge to whine about how much work you have to do, take a moment to re-read Emma Brown's article in Sunday's Daily News. Start with this paragraph:

“Victor Ochoa, a counselor at Carl Schurz High School in northwest Chicago, where students are overwhelmingly Hispanic and poor, said he has a caseload of 400 students and a grab bag of other duties: recruiting eighth-graders to enroll, registering students for classes and summer school, monitoring attendance, administering standardized tests, and helping students deal with crises from homelessness to street violence.”

Like many Americans, I put in some long days and I often feel overwhelmed and underappreciated. But I'll be the first to admit my to-do list pales in comparison to Ochoa's. Whatever he is being paid, let me go out on a limb here and suggest it probably isn't anywhere close to what he actually deserves.

While our politicians are busy pointing fingers or pontificating about the role of family values and personal responsibility, people like Ochoa are selflessly doing the heavy lifting it takes to make a genuine difference in the lives of others. A lot of Americans would rather sit around and complain than roll up their sleeves, jump headfirst into the trenches, and do what needs to be done to help secure a decent future for our children and grandchildren.

The answer is not school choice, which tends to view education as a commodity instead of a common good – or tax cuts, which will devastate schools serving poor and underrepresented populations. Even with its challenges, the only institution capable of making sure the United States doesn't continue its long slide into mediocrity is our public education system. Ochoa is doing his part; when are we going to step up and do ours?

Aaron W. Hughey
Bowling Green

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