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Good morning Chairman Miller and Congressional Committee members, I would like to thank everyone for the opportunity to share my story today. I hope all of y'all are doing well, and yes I did say "all y'all." I am from the south, born and raised and I am very proud of my southern roots. My rural home of Snow Hill in Greene County, North Carolina is a small community, with high poverty rates and is not well known; but just as this room is full of opportunity, intelligence, and determination to succeed with change, so is Greene County. The county's population is about 20,000 and there are about 3,200 students in our school system. 73% of these students receive free or reduced lunches. Thankfully, Greene County has systematically changed their schools through a one to one laptop program and is now home to what, in my case, was a portal to a new life.

Please know that I created the movie that is playing with photos and images to help you visualize while I am sharing my story.

Today, I will share who I am, where I came from and how my public education has impacted my life. I am not here to tell you how many gigabytes are in a laptop nor how fast I can download something directly from the Internet, I'll leave this to the professionals. I am only here to tell each of you that nothing is impossible; it is only a question of giving someone a chance or an opportunity.

Unfortunately, narcotics began to tear my family apart when I was 9 years old. Since then drugs have yet to cease in the deterioration of my family. By the time I was 10, my father had been imprisoned at least 3 times, fled from the law and I haven't heard from him since. My mother was left with 4 young kids to look after and with no education, she was forced to work in the fields from sunrise to sunset. Her farm-laboring job did not adequately provide for us and unfortunately, she eventually turned to drug trafficking to make ends meet. By the time I was 11, my two older brothers dropped out of high school. My brothers didn't believe a high school diploma was necessary to become successful. Although my mother heavily opposed their decisions, she did not know enough about the school system to motivate them to continue their education. The only positive thing that came out of my brothers dropping out of school was that they began to help support the family and my mom could finally make the commitment to change and stopped dealing drugs.

A month after my thirteen birthday, in October of 2004, I received a blow that would change my life forever. My mother was incarcerated on charges of trafficking cocaine to an undercover narcotics officer. This was more than a year after the last time she ever had anything to do with drugs. Her past had finally caught up with her. My perfect life crumpled beneath my eyes from one day to the next.

The events to follow were as expected of a 13 year old who had no adult supervision to keep him from straying into wrongdoing. My brother, although 3 years older than me, was left to care for me and was, at the time, more immature than I was. By sophomore year in high school, I had 46 absences, rapidly dropping grades, no parents, a torn family, and plans to soon drop out of school. By the age of 16, I was bailing my brother out of a detention center for traffic violations.

During my junior year, I met my healthcare instructor and mentor that helped me change my ways. Mrs. Lisa Wilson inspired me and shared with me how the use of technology tools could open doors. Technology helped to spark an interest in school and provided many of the resources that I lacked at home.

At the time, I didn't really understand the school's new educational model, or the hundreds of hours of on going training that my teachers had participated in to systematically change our school. I only knew that I had a laptop and I used technology in every classroom and through technology I had access to my teachers and classmates 24 hours a day-7 days a week. Soon it didn't matter that my home life was a mess or that Greene County was so isolated, the integration of technology opened the world to me.

By my senior year I placed first in a regional Health Care Club speech competition and in the top ten in the state competition. I was also varsity soccer team captain, Homecoming King, president of various clubs on campus, and had perfect attendance. Plus, I worked 2 to 3 jobs throughout the school year. At home, there was no inspiration and I truly dreaded the bell at the end of the school day. At least I knew when I left campus; I would be able to instant message my teachers and classmates with questions and could collaborate on group projects via emails and IM.

Since Greene County schools provided change with the one to one program, school life is very different than the traditional high school my brothers dropped out of. Students work collaboratively in groups, they are challenged by projects and thoughtful questions and the best part is everyone participates and pays attention. In addition to the laptops, students use digital cameras, video cameras, and interactive white boards. Students are being prepared for college and 21<sup>st</sup> Century careers. For example, in my physical science class I demonstrated elevated distance by providing visual image slides for my classmates. In chemistry, I was able to manipulate elements from the periodic table on the interactive whiteboard to show compound structure. Other examples of technology use in Greene Central High School, include designing web pages, filming and editing movies and creating thinking maps to name a few. Our teachers work extensively with a technology facilitator and a literacy facilitator to collaborate with one another to help make all of this happen. You see technology is not a luxury in today's society; it is a necessity.

Most importantly, the student body is now at optimal performance and growth in learning. Now, more than ever kids are graduating and are running past the limits of the older generations like my brothers and sister. Today, we aim beyond a high school

diploma and at a very minimum to a bachelor's degree. Many of us are setting our goals to obtain masters and even doctoral degrees. Our teachers in our rural home are preparing us through the use of technology to acquire skills that will not only give us a direction to head in but a jump start on our journey to successful careers.

Before technology entered our school system the average college going rate was 26%. By the time I graduated in 2008 our college going rate increased to 94%, our school record. This was a significant change of 68%. The average college going rate for our nation today is at about 60%. In the past, our rural county was far below average at a national level, now we are above average by 34%. Now, we are ahead of the game and our advancement is all thanks to the technology tools and great teachers who integrate the tools into their lessons. In addition to increased college going rates, I'm happy to share that this technology integration model has been instrumental in other changes within Greene Central High School:

- Increase availability for honors and AP classes through NC Virtual Public School. Including 5 Advanced Placement classes and 11 honors classes.
- Access to 5 college classes through University of North Carolina Greensboro iSchool.
- 100% of our teachers are Highly Qualified Teachers.
- 2005-06 and 2006-07 Greene Central met Adequate Yearly Progress
- Teen Pregnancy Rates has dropped from #2 in the state to #18
- Expected or High Growth on North Carolina Accountability System (NC ABC) Testing each year
- Dropout Rate Decreases For example in 2007-08 there were 63 drop outs and to date in 2008-09 only 53.

Not only has our school changed. This initiative has brought great changes to our entire community including:

- Increase High Speed Internet Access from 15% to 92% throughout our county. The Greene County Board of Commissioners supported the school system's need for community Internet access.
- New Business
- New Industrial Park
- New Recreation Complex
- New Golf Resort Community

And most importantly, community PRIDE!

Thankfully, there are other students across the country and even in North Carolina that are also benefiting from having technology in their schools. Other schools in North Carolina have the IMPACT program that is another technology integration program with a focus on teachers, students and planning. The IMPACT program was recently included in a scientific evaluation study funded by the US Department of Education and showed a positive impact on student achievement. In math, the odds that IMPACT students would go from non-passing to passing status over the three years was 42% higher than that for comparison students. In reading, the odds of IMPACT students increasing achievement

level from the second to the fourth years were 3 times that of comparison students. This study shows that students throughout North Carolina are having success because of their use of technology in their schools. The study also showed that teachers participating in the program were 65% more likely to be retained than teachers in comparison schools. I know at Greene Central our teachers were really dedicated to our program and having them stay at our school made a big difference. Below are additional statistics about the North Carolina IMPACT program.

- **Math:** When looking at pass/fail rates for the End of Grade (EOG) math tests, in the baseline year IMPACT students were significantly less likely to pass the math tests than comparison students. By the fourth year, IMPACT students were more likely to pass the test.
- **Reading:** When looking at change in passing status, the odds that IMPACT students would increase from failing to passing over the four years were 55% higher than the odds for comparison students. When looking at Year two to year four with the larger sample, the odds were 43% higher for IMPACT students.
- **Teachers:** IMPACT teachers consistently saw IT as more useful, and had more positive attitudes toward the usefulness of email, the World Wide Web, multimedia in the classroom, and instructional technology for teachers than the comparison teachers.<sup>1</sup>

I have just finished my freshman year at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina with a major in pediatric nursing and I am the first person in my immediate family to attend a university. I received a national Nurse Scholars scholarship that entitles me to \$20,000 for my post secondary educational costs. I am currently employed in 2 upscale assisted living facilities as a Certified Nursing Assistant. I'm so thankful to have received my nurse's assistant credentials as part of my high school curriculum so that I can have these jobs today.

I am not here to tell you a fairy tale story of how I came from the bottom and now I am at the top. In fact, I am nowhere near the top. I am only climbing. I am climbing the same mountain almost every student in Greene County is climbing, the mountain of success. My story is a series of unfortunate events and my fairy tale is far from coming true. Although this may seem like a most ordinary story, something not so ordinary happened along the way that changed my life drastically to give me the chance to stand before you today-technology. Technology tools helped me to create, learn, explain, document, and analyze. My grades could not have been successful without the constant e-mails that kept me in contact with my teachers and peers. I could not have shined through without the use of power points and movies. My application to East Carolina University, SAT registration, and most recently my Nurse Scholars Program application were all completed online. Without technology there is no way I could be testifying today. Honestly, I would probably be just another dropout.

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<sup>1</sup> North Carolina IMPACT Model <http://www.ncwiseowl.org/IMPACT/>

There are many students across the country just like me that only need a chance or an opportunity to change their future. Life is all about chances and opportunities and how you take advantage of them. Even diamonds have to be uncovered and discovered to show their brilliance and beauty. Young people across America are these diamonds. Technology is the perfect tool for these young diamonds to shine across our beautiful home we call America. It is our future for learning!