

**Testimony to the Committee on Education
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the State Board of Education**

**Nadia Gold-Moritz, Executive Director
Young Women's Project**

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Good afternoon Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee on Education. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Nadia Gold-Moritz Executive Director of the Young Women's Project (YWP) and a DC Public School parent. YWP is a DC-based nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities. Since 1994, YWP has developed thousands of youth leaders and has worked in partnership with a number of DC agencies to develop policy and implement programs in sexual health education and services, foster care rights and opportunities, youth employment, and other issues. YWP programs cover a broad range of interventions -- from after school leadership programming to youth employment, peer education, youth-led research, and policy development.

YWP's largest program, the Youth Health Education Program (YHEP), employs more than 200 youth educators in 11 DC Public High Schools and 5 Public Charters who work in partnership with these schools and the Department of Health (DOH) to improve sexual health outcomes. So far this year, YHEP educators conducted 15,374 educational interventions, made 370 clinic referrals, and distributed 51,916 condoms and dental dams. They also trained 150 health teachers, collected data from more than 500 youth on health, violence, education, and other issues, cultivated more than 200 relationships with administrators and teachers in DC public and charter schools, provided youth outreach for school-based STI-HIV testing, made significant contributions to the DC Health Education Standards, and presented more than 40 testimonies to five Council Committees.

During the past two years, YWP adult and youth staff worked closely with the State Board of Education (SBOE) to develop and move the 2016 DC Health Education Standards. The DC State Learning Standards for Health Education specify the concepts and skills that students need to know and do, from pre-K through 12th grade. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) use the standards to develop curriculum and professional development. Teachers use them to inform lesson plans and instruction. Parents and students use them to monitor progress. These standards were developed through a rare collaboration between government and nonprofits and youth and adults. As a member of the Health Standards Working Group, YWP staff worked on the development, drafting, and

vetting of the health standards, which were submitted to OSSE in September. We are pleased that OSSE has released an official draft and that we are on track for an April State Board vote.

I am here today to share some of our experience working as a partner with the State Board and why their role is so vital to the continued improvement of DC educational systems. We are especially grateful to State Board President Jack Jacobson and Executive Director John-Paul Hayworth for their commitment to engaging youth leaders. As you know, education systems can't improve without the meaningful input of children and youth and their ownership and engagement. Yet there are very few places -- other than your Committee hearings -- where that input is welcomed and youth are treated as valuable, equal partners working side-by-side with adults. YWP spends considerable time and energy just trying to open doors and tables so that young people can be part of the dialogue and participate in the work and decisions that impact their lives -- which is why we really appreciate the State Board's commitment. There are three areas we would like to acknowledge:

SBOE walks the walk of youth engagement: Youth perspectives and engagement are essential for educational progress but they are rarely included in meaningful ways. The State Board engages youth as members of the Board itself, as members of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC), on project working groups like the health standards working group we were part of, and as Jhirbron mentioned, as experts on State Board meeting panels. SBOE members and staff invest the time and energy it takes to develop and educate youth leaders, create accessible power structures, and accommodate their work and communication styles so that youth can work side-by-side adult leaders. This takes an enormous amount of time and commitment. Since these youth roles and opportunities are not available through DCPS or OSSE -- this space is all the more important. SBOE is a model for other agencies in their youth engagement work.

SBOE is commitment to public engagement and accessibility. What other agency holds monthly meetings and working sessions that are open to the public and encourage public comments. This kind of engagement does make for very late meetings, but it is one of the few places where the concerns of the average student or parent can actually make their way into the policy process. This accessibility is especially important in light of the much more restrictive public engagement approach taken by the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE).

SBOE is willing to try bold strategies overlooked by other educational agencies: Every agency has their function and perspective. When OSSE looks at the health education standards, they see assessments, data, teacher training. When DCPS looks at the health education standards, they see FTEs and instructional priorities.

When SBOE looks at the health standards, they see solutions to the many health challenges that DC youth are facing and, as Jack Jacobson said at the January Meeting, support so they know they are not alone. It was this perspective that launched the Health Standards project, opened the door to a bold revision, and kept the project going through two years of setbacks. Thanks to the State Board, we have the most far reaching, ambitious, and youth needs based standards in the country.

Thank you for your own commitment to youth accessibility and for hearing my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.