

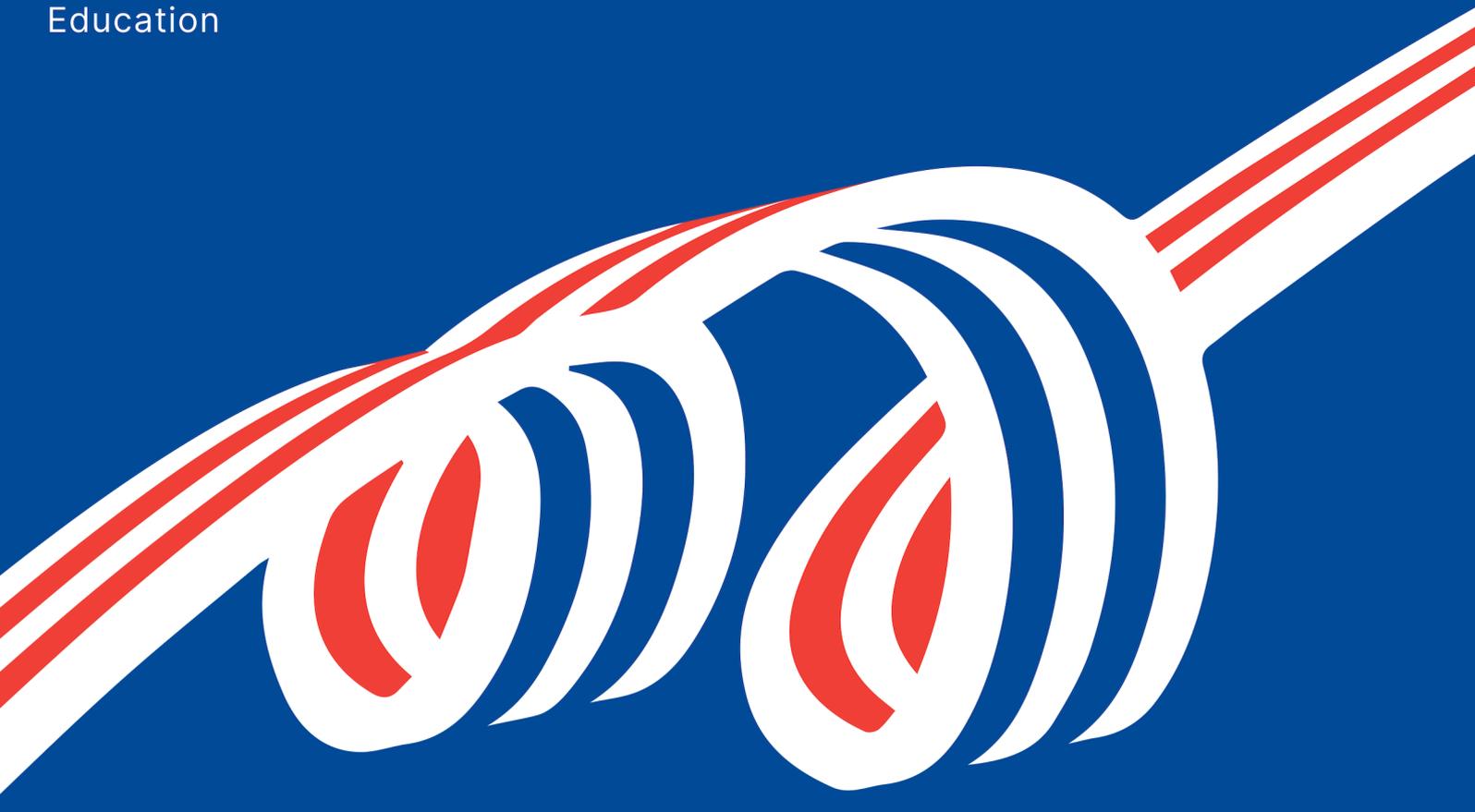


D.C. EDUCATION GOVERNANCE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

MARCH 2023

PRESENTED BY

D.C. State Board of
Education





D.C. Education Governance Recommendations and Considerations

Executive Summary

Centering the voices of community members across D.C., this report provides recommendations intended to improve how students, educators, school-based leaders, and families/caregivers experience the city’s education system. Their feedback and input guided the development of each recommendation, summarized below. The D.C. State Board of Education (State Board) acknowledges the progress and positive strides our partners in the current educational ecosystem (Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), DC Public Schools (DCPS), and the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB)) have made to enhance equity and ensure a high-quality education for every child in D.C. These six (6) recommendations listed below serve to build on the current education governance system and structures through the lens of those most impacted.

1. Authorize the State Board to initiate policy in the areas where it currently has statutory approval authority as enumerated under D.C. Code § 38–2652 and to amend policies brought to the State Board by the OSSE.
2. Provide the State Board with a “great weight” similar to Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs)—where the State Board can elevate education-related issues and concerns, be notified of proposed decisions to make educational changes in D.C., and receive a written explanation from education agencies that choose to comply (or not to comply) with State Board requests.
3. Create a centralized website or education governance hub and community hotline that maps, tracks, and closes community members’ education issues under the auspices of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and the Office of the Student Advocate.
4. Expand the State Board’s authority to obtain data upon request from D.C.’s education agencies (e.g., DME, OSSE, DCPS, and DC PCSB) in a timely way.
5. Authorize the State Board to approve schools’ opening, closing, and siting.
6. Create a citywide board that oversees DCPS operations and facilities.

In the report, each recommendation is accompanied by a description of how it addresses community needs, considerations for implementation, what success could look like, and an example of each recommendation in action. The report closes with a discussion of three (3) exploratory topics that require further research before deciding whether they are feasible for implementation.





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Purpose of the Report

This report is built on the voices of students, educators, school-based leaders, and families/caregivers across D.C. Reading through the report, three main ideas are presented, each designed to lift up community members' diverse feedback and issues. First, this report describes how the State Board collected feedback from community members and what was learned from these outreach efforts. Next, the report lists what changes could be made (in the form of six (6) recommendations) to improve the education system and address the needs of community members. Thirdly, this report considers what is needed to successfully implement each recommendation and an example of what each would look like if implemented. The report closes with three (3) exploratory topics that could be researched to further address community needs and feedback.

Information Gathering and Community Outreach

This section provides an overview of the information-gathering process that led to the development of the six (6) education governance recommendations. Report and website links and citations are provided in the footnotes for further information.

Information Gathering Timeline and Process

In February 2021, the Board Governance Committee¹ was officially established and tasked with researching how mayoral control in D.C.'s education system compares to other localities and surveying public opinions of and experiences with D.C.'s current education governance structure. The Committee spent most of 2021 focused on collecting information on other state board governance structures, authorities, and powers, as well as a review of the D.C. Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (PERAA)².

Following initial research efforts and inviting experts to speak on PERAA and education governance, the Board Governance Committee shifted its focus to community engagement. During the State Board's Fall Engagement in November and December of 2021, the Board Governance Committee presented its work and collected participant feedback on their experiences with the education system in D.C. and suggestions on how to improve it. The common themes highlighted in this initial outreach effort were the need to help families navigate the D.C. education landscape,

¹ An ad hoc committee of the State Board. See *SR21-2 On the Establishment of Committees*. Retrieved from <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/documents/SR21-2%20Establishment%20of%20Committees%20SIGNED.pdf>

² *District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007*. B17-0001. Retrieved from <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B17-0001>





equitably elevating caregiver/student voices, making community members feel heard, and improving transparency in education governance decision-making.³

During the summer of 2022, 1,132 community members (65 percent or 734 of which identified as parents or primary caregivers) completed an Education Governance survey⁴ and 22 caregivers participated in an education governance focus group⁵. Similar to the initial outreach efforts at the 2021 Fall Engagement sessions, survey participants were asked about their experiences with the education system in D.C. and ways this system could be improved. Table 1 below provides a summary of key demographics from the Education Governance Survey:

Table 1: Education Governance Survey Key Demographics

School Type	% of Responses	# of Responses	Race/Ethnicity	% of Responses	# of Responses
DCPS + DCPS Alternative	73%	561	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%	14
Charter + Charter Alternative	25%	195	Asian	4%	41
Private School	9%	71	Black or African American	28%	307
Ward of Residence	% of Responses	# of Responses	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	5
Ward 1	9%	90	White	56%	626
Ward 2	5%	49	Prefer not to answer	11%	122
Ward 3	29%	294	Other	4%	48
Ward 4	21%	216	Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish (Y/N)	% of Responses	# of Responses
Ward 5	12%	125	Yes	12%	131
Ward 6	9%	94	No	81%	894
Ward 7	9%	92	School Services Child Receives	% of Responses	# of Responses
Ward 8	5%	54	English-language learner (ELL) services	11%	86
			Individualized Education Program (IEP) services	17%	133
			504 Plan	10%	75
			None of the above apply	66%	500
			Other	2%	18

*Not all demographic categories will add up to 100% due to some demographic choices not listed.

³ D.C. State Board of Education (2021). *Fall Engagement Board Governance Notes*. Retrieved from <https://www.dropbox.com/s/oxeb189uo1rwtsk/2021-12-09-NOTES-Fall%20Engagement%20Board%20Governance.pdf?dl=0>

⁴ D.C. State Board of Education. (2022). *Education Governance Survey Report*. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/rh3n06jftpagu7k/2022-09-07-FINAL-Education%20Governance%20Survey%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

⁵ Keisler et al. (2022). *Parent/Caregiver Experiences and Perceptions Regarding the DC Education Agencies: Qualitative Research Findings*. Keisler Social & Behavioral Research. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/85gj578ss7rfz25/2022-09-07-FINAL-%20Keisler-Education%20Governance%20Focus%20Group%20Report.pdf?dl=0>



Key highlights from the *Education Governance Survey Report* included the following⁶:

- Survey respondents seemed to understand, at least somewhat well, the roles of DCPS⁷ and OSSE, yet less than half are familiar with agencies like the DC PCSB and the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA).

“As a new parent to a school age child in DC, I find the system a bit mystifying. I have no idea who is making decisions or how to feed into those, if I do have concerns.” –Survey Participant

- Given the opportunity to choose top education priorities from a list of education issues that should be immediately addressed by the education system in D.C., variations emerged. Among a list of eighteen education issues, the top four (4) priorities chosen were:
 1. Program quality in schools
 2. Mental health issues
 3. Bullying and/or violence issues
 4. Too many tests

“La violencia a afectado mucho a los estudiantes mucho racismo y pandillas que han tratado de tomar el miedo de los estudiantes” (“The violence has affected students a lot, there is a lot of racism, and gangs that have tried to bring fear to the students”). –Survey Participant

- When prompted to list education-related issues that need to be urgently addressed, the following top three themes emerged:
 1. School staff concerns
 2. Academic quality
 3. Bullying and school safety
- Participants felt more improvement should be made in how the education system incorporates residents’ feedback into the decision-making process and addresses them.

“Having equal percentages of communities[sic.]members, parents, teachers and students involved in education decisions. Understanding that multiple conversations must be had in order to get to a place that all voices[are]heard and that all parties involved have certain ideas put into the policy or decisions.” –Survey Participant

- Information-sharing is key to making residents feel heard.
- When asked to share ways to improve the education system in D.C., the top five (5) themes from respondents were:
 1. Restructuring education governance structure and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.)
 2. Elevating parent, student, and teacher voice in education decision-making
 3. Equitable funding and resources
 4. Ensuring students’ access to a well-rounded education
 5. Improving transparency in decision-making, spending, and school data

⁶ See Appendix A for a ward-level comparison of findings from the Education Governance Survey.

⁷ Most (71 percent) respondents identified as parents, guardians, or students affiliated with DCPS.

Below are key demographics for Education Governance Focus Group participants (see Table 2 below) and key findings from the focus groups. Like the survey, participants were asked questions about their experiences and concerns with the current education system in D.C. and improvements to the education system that would address them. Table 2 below provides a summary of key demographics from the Education Governance Focus Group study:

Table 2: Education Governance Focus Group Study Key Demographics

School Type	# of Participants	Relationship to Public or Private Schools in DC	# of Participants
DC Public School (DCPS)	9	Black or African American	11
DC Public Charter School	6	White	5
Private School	3	Prefer not to answer	1
SED Center	3	Unknown	5
College	1	Total	22
Unknown	4	Primary Language	# of Participants
Total	26	English	17
Ward of Residence	# of Participants	Spanish	5
Ward 1	1	Total	22
Ward 2	0	School Services Child Receives	# of Participants
Ward 3	1	504 Plan	4
Ward 4	7	College student with disability	1
Ward 5	1	English-Language Learner (ELL) Services	2
Ward 6	3	Individualized Education Program (IEP) Services	6
Ward 7	4	Mental Health/Anxiety Support	1
Ward 8	3	None of the Above	10
Unknown	2	Unknown	1
Total	22	Total	25
School Level	# of Participants		
Toddler Class	1		
Pre-K 3 - 4	6		
Elementary School (K - 5)	8		
Middle School (6 - 8)	5		
High School (9 - 12)	7		
College	1		
Unknown	1		
Total	29		

**Note: Totals do not always sum to 22 since respondents could choose more than one category for Type of School, Services Student Receives, and School Level. “Unknown” indicates unreported data; demographic data shown were provided by the State Board.*



Key findings from the *Education Governance Focus Group Report* included the following:

- Two main education system-level concerns from focus group participants included:
 - Quality of education
 - Mental and behavioral health support

“I also think socio-emotional [issues are] across the board...because of the pandemic, there is a deficit in terms of just civility, kindness, talking appropriately to your peers, how do we handle when you’re frustrated, you’re angry, you’re disappointed. You know what I’m saying? The kids are lacking this, and they need the support.” – Focus Group Participant

- Many participants know most D.C. education agencies/offices by name but are unaware of specific roles within the D.C. education system. There is very little awareness of some agencies/offices.

About DC education governing bodies: *“We don’t know who these people are, what their roles are, and who we should reach out to when we have an issue.” –Focus Group Participant*

- Participants perceive the education governance system and structure to be overwhelming and difficult to navigate, even for the most informed and involved parents/caregivers.

“...There’s a revolving bureaucracy with a lack of knowledge. What has to be installed is authenticity and accountability, transparency, consistency, and integrity...” –Focus Group Participant

“It requires a lot of advocacy and tenacity to work your way through that system...it’s very easy to give up.” – Focus Group Participant

- Increased clarity on the system hierarchy, and which agency to contact (including specific contact information) for certain issues, would improve parent/caregiver engagement.
- Participants voiced a need for a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.

“What I did like that we don’t have anymore, is when we did have a school board, there was some democracy. There was somebody that I actually voted for, that I could go to who would take ownership and experience at the local school level. We don’t have anybody– The state board doesn’t do that, they do something different.” –Focus Group Participant

- Community-based engagement by the State Board is key to raising its visibility and leverage as a trusted resource.

“...Have a community-based type of commune with people. That’s the engagement you need so you can build that trust factor of the school board, and then you can build an alignment of connections with mindsets, thoughts, and desired outcomes together to move the district forward.” - Focus Group Participant

Findings from the three public outreach engagements described above led to the development of eight (8) education governance takeaways, which informed the development of the key education



governance recommendations. Table 3 below lists each of the eight (8) community feedback takeaways.

Table 3: Education Governance Community Feedback Takeaways

<p>Takeaway #1: D.C. residents want increased clarity on the education system hierarchy and which agency to contact (including specific contact information) for certain issues to improve parent/caregiver engagement.</p>
<p>Takeaway #2: D.C. residents are aware of some D.C. education agencies/offices by name but are not aware of their specific roles within the D.C. education system. There is very little awareness of some agencies/offices. Residents perceive the education governance system and structure to be overwhelming and difficult to navigate, even for the most informed and involved parents/caregivers.</p>
<p>Takeaway #3: To ease the complicated structure of the D.C. education system, there should be a central website with everything residents need to know about education and schooling in D.C. and share monthly communications with concerns that families and students shared and how they are being addressed.</p>
<p>Takeaway #4: Students’, educators’, and parent/caregivers’ voices need a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.</p>
<p>Takeaway #5: Community-based engagement by the State Board is key to raising their visibility and leverage as a trusted resource.</p>
<p>Takeaway #6: Issues that need to be immediately addressed by the education system in D.C. are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Program quality in schools 2. Mental health issues of students and school staff 3. Bullying and/or violence issues 4. Too many tests
<p>Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.).</p>
<p>Takeaway #8: The education system in D.C. should focus on ensuring:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equitable funding and resources to schools, students, and educators 2. All students’ access to a well-rounded education 3. Improving transparency in school data (including how funds are spent)

From Takeaways to Recommendations

To receive public feedback on the eight (8) takeaways listed above, State Board members engaged with parents, caregivers, and other education stakeholders, asking them to score how strongly each takeaway resonated with them (from 1–5, 5 being the highest), as well provide any comments they had for each takeaway. In total, 49 members of the public provided feedback on the takeaways,



with 111 comments spanning all eight takeaways⁸. At the November 16, 2022, State Board Public Meeting⁹, four (4) education governance expert witnesses¹⁰ provided further feedback on the takeaways through testimony and answering questions from members. An analysis of scored community feedback and summaries from expert testimony on the takeaways can be found in the *Education Governance Recommendations Memo*¹¹. Highlights from community member feedback and expert education governance panelists on the eight (8) takeaways included:

- Overall, all eight (8) takeaways resonated with attendees.
- Among the eight (8) takeaways, takeaway 3 (i.e., providing a centralized hub of education system information) and takeaway 8 (i.e., ensuring equitable funding/resources, well-rounded education, and improvements to public transparency and access to data) resonated the most with participating education stakeholders.
- There should be increased collaboration between education agencies and organizations in D.C. to enhance transparency, share and act on community voices, build community trust, and support strategic redistribution of funding.
- The State Board could play an important role in using the power of public voice to put pressure on education agencies but should avoid impugning agencies.
- Reliable, relevant information is important, and one consideration may be to advocate for the State Superintendent to report directly to the State Board with timely and specifically defined data definitions.
- On targeted supports and funding for Ward 7 and 8 schools, the State Board can visit schools regularly, listen and identify needs, and then advocate for those needs.
- The decision-making process should have feedback loops built in to generate trust with community members and set the foundation for meaningful public engagement.
- Develop a website that helps people access services and direct them to appropriate agencies and organizations for particular educational needs

Following the November 16 Public Meeting, the Board Governance Committee held a special meeting on December 12, 2022¹² to vote on takeaways that would advance to SR22-17¹³, *Recommendations on Changes to Education Governance in the District of Columbia*¹⁴; during the

⁸ (1) The September 24 State Board Back-To-School Engagement, (2) a Ward 7 Education Council meeting on November 3, and (3) a Ward 5 Education Council meeting on November 16.

⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTrtMFHtMfA&t=962s>

¹⁰ Dr. Joshua Glazer (Associate Professor, Education Policy at George Washington University), Dr. Elizabeth Grant (Associate Professor, Deputy Chair, Department of Educational Leadership at George Washington University), Mark Jones (Former Ward 5 Representative, D.C. State Board of Education), and Dr. Kenneth Wong (Director, Urban Education Policy Program at Brown University). Sendehil Revuluri (Vice President, Chicago Board of Education) provided written testimony.

¹¹ D.C. State Board of Education. (2022). Education Governance Recommendations Memo.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/syeq9ejvlb7tqgn/2022-12-01-FINAL-Education%20Governance%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

¹² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voBy6UVx73Y>

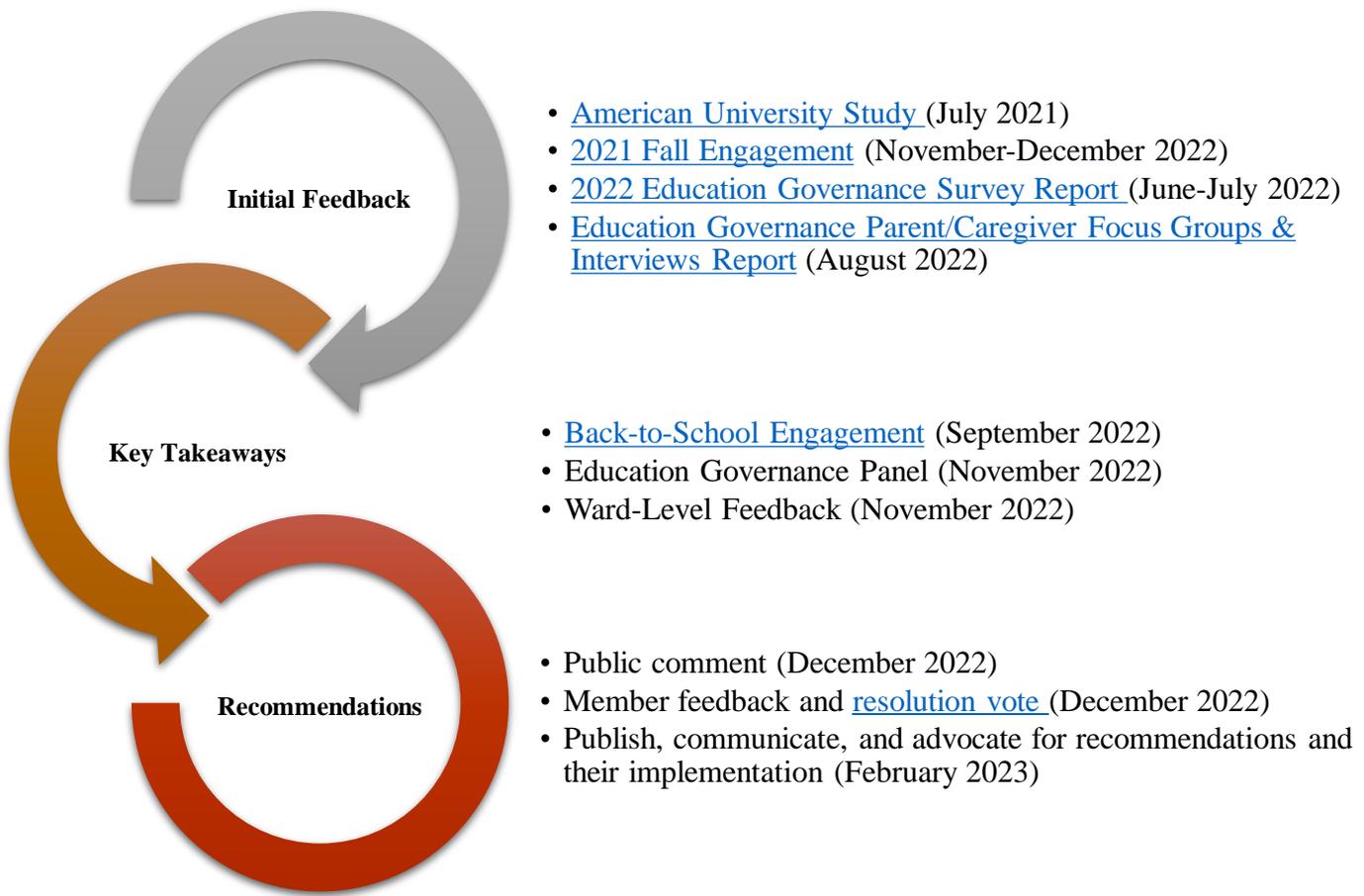
¹³ See Appendix B for other community feedback featured in the takeaways but not included in the recommendations or exploratory topics outlined in SR22-17.

¹⁴ See <https://www.dropbox.com/home/Meetings/2023/2023-01/2023-01-11-Working%20Session/Attachments/VII.%20Priority%20Work%20Overview?preview=2022-12-21-SR22-17-SIGNED-Recommendations+on+Changes+to+Education+Governance+in+DC.pdf>



December 21, 2022 Public Meeting¹⁵, members voted in favor of adopting six (6) recommendations and three (3) exploratory topics outlined in SR22-17. Figure 1 below outlines the entire process—from collecting information and community feedback on education governance in D.C. to voting on and publicly sharing State Board recommendations to improve education governance in the city.

Figure 1: Education Governance Recommendations Process



¹⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvO1FhTZqV8>

Education Governance Recommendations and Considerations

In this final section, the six (6) recommendations and three (3) exploratory topics featured in SR22-17 are provided, along with 1) context and problems addressed by their implementation, 2) their alignment with one or more of the eight (8) key takeaways discussed above, 3) implementation considerations, 4) the immediacy and suggested implementation time, and 5) examples of what the recommendation would look like once implemented. Each recommendation—arranged by its feasibility score¹⁶—is listed below from easy (green), moderate (orange), or challenging (red). Table 4 below outlines all six (6) recommendations, including their suggested feasibility level to implement, cost, immediacy, and impacted education agencies.

Table 4: Education Governance Recommendation Chart

Recommendation #	Recommendation	Feasibility to Implement	Cost	Implementation Time	Immediately Implement? (Y/N)	Impacted Education Agencies
1	Authorize the State Board to initiate policy in the areas in which it currently has statutory approval authority as enumerated under § 38-2652 and to amend policies brought to the State Board by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).	Easy	\$	At least two years (by end of FY25)	Y	OSSE
2	Provide the State Board with a “great weight” similar to Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs)—where the State Board can elevate education-related issues and concerns, be notified of proposed decisions to make educational changes in D.C., and receive a written explanation from education agencies that choose to comply (or not to comply) with State Board requests.	Easy	\$	At least one year (by end of FY24)	Y	OSSE DCPS DC PCSB DME
3	Create a centralized website or education governance hub and community hotline that maps, tracks, and closes community members’ education issues under the auspices of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and Office of the Student Advocate.	Moderate	\$\$\$	No more than two years (by start of FY25)	Y	OSA OMB OSSE DCPS DC PCSB DME
4	Authorize the State Board to approve the opening, closing, and siting of schools.	Moderate	\$\$	At least two years (by end of FY25)	N	OSSE DCPS DC PCSB DME
5	Expand the State Board’s authority to obtain data upon request from D.C.’s education agencies (e.g., the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), DC Public Schools (DCPS), and the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB)) in a timely way.	Challenging	\$\$	At least two years (by end of FY25)	Y	OSSE DCPS DC PCSB DME
6	Create a citywide board that oversees DC Public Schools (DCPS) operations and facilities.	Challenging	\$\$\$	Several years (by FY26-FY27)	N	DCPS DC PCSB (Maybe) DGS

¹⁶ Feasibility scores are based on summing points from the following five (5) implementation categories: 1) Cost/Resources/human capital required, 2) Changing D.C. Code, 3) Number of agencies impacted, 4) Time needed to implement, and 5) Immediacy of Implementation. The lowest score a recommendation could receive is 5 and the highest is 24. Combining feasibility scores from all five categories, recommendations with a final score between 5–15 points would be easy to implement, 16–20 points would be moderate, and 21-24 points would be challenging.



Recommendation #1

Authorize the State Board to initiate policy in the areas in which it currently has statutory approval authority as enumerated under § 38–2652 and to amend policies brought to the State Board by OSSE.

EASY

Context and problem addressed

Community members from across D.C. come to the State Board with various issues needing to be addressed but are not taken up by OSSE at the time (i.e., issues around bullying and student safety, attendance policies, etc.).

This recommendation would allow the State Board to prompt OSSE to begin updating or changing policies that the State Board has the authority to approve under the functions of the State Board.

Takeaway tie-in and problems addressed

Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.).

Consideration for implementation

The D.C. Council should amend D.C. Code § 38–2652 (a) to include initiating policy in the areas in which it currently has statutory approval authority, as well as include the State Board’s ability to amend policies brought to the State Board by OSSE.

This recommendation will be accomplished when the State Board initiates policies it has approval authority over and can amend policies brought to the State Board by OSSE successfully.

Immediacy/time taken to implement fully

Implementation of this recommendation could begin immediately.

This recommendation should be fully implemented by the end of FY25, allowing time to review and vote on this recommendation adequately. Two years after adoption, an evaluation should be conducted on whether OSSE complies with initiating policy or amending education policies brought forth by OSSE to the State Board.

Potential examples of implementation success

At a public meeting, the State Board heard from numerous educators about their concerns regarding the need for updated physical education standards. The State Board has also listened to these complaints at previous public meetings. Recognizing this is a critical need, the State Board drafted a letter requesting updates to the existing physical education standards. State Board leadership presented this to the State Superintendent during their monthly meetings. With timely review upon this request, the State Superintendent and the team at OSSE began reviewing and updating the health education standards (notifying the State Board of its progress).

Recommendation #2

Afford the State Board with a “great weight” requirement in all government agency decisions that impact schools, students, and education stakeholders

EASY

Context and problem addressed

Similar to the “great weight” Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) are given by D.C. government agencies, this recommendation could strengthen government agency accountability regarding proposed education decisions. When the State Board raises issues or concerns from the community or with proposed changes that impact schools, those education agencies would be required to acknowledge the State Board through written statements that clearly explain whether they will comply with the State Board’s advice (or not) and why.

This recommendation reflects feedback from community members that expressed that their voices are not heard, and their education concerns are not being addressed. Turning to the State Board, community voices could be amplified and acknowledged by affording the State Board with great weight.

Takeaway tie-in and problems addressed

Takeaway #4: Students, educators, and parent/caregivers’ voices need a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.

Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.

Consideration for implementation

The D.C. Council should amend D.C. Code § 38–2652 (c) with language that affords the State Board with “great weight” from D.C.’s education agencies (e.g., DME, OSSE, DCPS, and DC PCSB), requiring acknowledgment of the State Board as the source of recommendations and explicitly referencing each of the State Board’s issues and concerns.

The amendment should reference education agencies providing the State Board with a Notice of Intent (NOI) written 30 days (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays) before any intentions to impact education in D.C.

This recommendation will be successfully implemented once the State Board receives great weight when providing issues and concerns raised in its recommendations on education agency-proposed decisions.

Immediacy/time taken to implement fully

Implementation of this recommendation could begin immediately.

This recommendation should be fully implemented by the end of FY24, allowing D.C. Council to discuss and review the legislative changes needed before voting on the amendment. An evaluation for great weight compliance should occur within two years of amending § 38–2652 (c).

Potential examples of implementation success

During a State Board Public Meeting, several parents complain about bullying issues at their school, particularly that little is being done to address them. The State Board heightens the attention with OSSE to ensure standard operating procedures (SOPs) are in place to address students’ bullying and safety at schools. OSSE then addresses the issue transparently (providing a timeline, community outreach, and policy changes) or writes a letter to the State Board explaining why the agency cannot comply with such measures.

Recommendation #3

Create a centralized website or education governance hub and constituent hotline that maps, tracks, and closes constituent education issues under the auspices of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and Office of the Student Advocate.

MODERATE

Context and problem addressed

The purpose of Recommendation #3 is to enhance the capacity of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and Office of the Student Advocate, including their respective resources and services provided to students and families across D.C. It is important to note that both are independent, impartial offices housed within the State Board.

The Office of the Student Advocate provides guidance and resource support to assist families in navigating the complex public education system in D.C. by taking calls on their hotline and providing resources on their website. Their website's enhancement could provide a more interactive feature to allow students, educators, and families to better navigate and understand the education landscape and available resources. Additional advertising funds could point more families and students toward this office's resources, services, and proposed interactive governance website.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education currently has a constituent hotline, and their staff map, track, and closes constituent education issues; increasing the capacity of the State Board office, such as hiring a data analyst, could build the capacity for more advanced tracking and analysis of hotline calls or open/closed cases across D.C. for the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, Office of the Student Advocate, and the State Board.

Takeaway tie-in and problems addressed

Takeaway #1: D.C. residents want increased clarity on the education system hierarchy and which agency to contact (including specific contact information) for certain issues to improve parent/caregiver engagement.

Takeaway #2: D.C. residents are aware of some D.C. education agencies/offices by name but are unaware of their specific roles within the D.C. education system. There is very little awareness of some agencies/offices. Residents perceive the education governance system and structure to be overwhelming and difficult to navigate, even for the most informed and involved parents/caregivers.

Takeaway #3: To ease the complicated structure of the D.C. education system, there should be a central website with everything residents need to know about education and schooling in D.C. and share monthly communications with concerns that families and students shared and how they are being addressed.

Consideration for implementation

No changes to legislation are necessary.

This recommendation will be accomplished by budgeting for 1) enhancements to the Office of the Student Advocate's website that any visitors can easily navigate, 2) funding for at least one full-time employee (i.e., data analyst) to be housed with the State Board, and 3) increased advertising funding for both offices.

Immediacy/time taken to implement fully

This recommendation *cannot* be implemented immediately.

This recommendation should be fully implemented by the start of FY25, allowing time to hire and onboard a data analyst and a vendor to enhance the Office of the Student Advocate's website features.

Potential examples of implementation success

A parent visits the Office of the Student Advocate's website seeking information on which office they should contact about enrolling their child in a different school in D.C. due to unresolved issues with the school principal. After answering a few prompts on the interactive website, the parent is provided with contact information for both the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and Office of the Student Advocate, a dynamic map highlighting where these offices sit in relation to the education governance structure, and a list of resources available to families.

Recommendation #4

Authorize the State Board to approve the opening, closing, and siting of schools.

MODERATE

Context and problem addressed	<p>The State Board plays an important role in understanding community needs and focuses specifically on education matters across D.C.</p> <hr/> <p>Following the passage of PERAA, the school board of D.C.—which had the power to grant approval for the opening of public charter schools—had been changed to the D.C. State Board of Education, which lost this ability. DC Council currently has the ability to change Congress’ School Reform Act of 1995 to require more oversight and control over public charter schools (including their opening, closing, and siting of schools).</p> <hr/> <p>There is currently no District-wide body that considers the implications of a school opening, closing, or siting on other school communities/dynamics, particularly across sectors; opening, closing, and siting of schools is not guided by District-wide planning or needs.</p> <hr/> <p>This recommendation would ensure the State Board serves as an intermediary to address school-level and community-specific issues (i.e., facility conditions, neighborhood schools, staffing availability, etc.) when discussing the opening and closing of public schools, as well as deciding the location of public schools in D.C.</p>
Takeaway tie-in and problems addressed	<p>Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.).</p>
Consideration for implementation	<p>The D.C. Council should amend D.C. Code § 38–2652 (a) to include approval authority over the opening, closing, and siting of schools.</p> <hr/> <p>This recommendation will be successful when the State Board votes for the opening, closing, or siting decisions of public schools in D.C.</p> <hr/> <p>This might be coupled with Recommendation #2 around affording the State Board with great weight.</p> <hr/> <p>To ensure the successful implementation of this recommendation, a comprehensive plan for the opening, closing, and siting of schools should be developed.</p> <hr/> <p>The State Board would need an additional full-time employee to collect community and education agency feedback and information and report on the feasibility of opening, closing, and considering the proposed locations of public schools in D.C.</p>
Immediacy/time taken to implement fully	<p>This recommendation <i>cannot</i> be implemented immediately.</p> <hr/> <p>This recommendation should be fully implemented by the end of FY25, allowing time for research, discussions, and reviewing changes to D.C. law and government structures before voting on the amendment.</p>
Potential examples of implementation success	<p>At a State Board working session, the State Board discusses an increase in DCPS closures. This is a significant concern as D.C. is facing a decline in reading and math scores. With the State Board members interested in learning more about this connection, State Board staff developed a report examining the impact of school closures on student academic performance in the District. The State Board used this report to develop a resolution and codify practices for operating school closures and openings.</p>

Recommendation #5

Expand the State Board's authority to obtain data upon request from D.C.'s education agencies (e.g., the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), DC Public Schools (DCPS), and the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB)) in a timely way.

CHALLENGING**Context and problem addressed**

This recommendation addresses issues with the State Board's timely access to education data that would inform advocacy, approval decisions, and state and local accountability measures. Such accurate and objective information is important in gathering education stakeholders and experts and sharing findings to encourage public discussions.

To increase transparency, education agencies would need to provide data (e.g., graduation rates, teacher retention information, etc.) to the State Board in a reasonable amount of time upon request.

Takeaway tie-in

Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.).

Takeaway #8: The education system in D.C. should focus on ensuring... Improving transparency in school data (including how funds are spent).

Consideration for implementation

The D.C. Council should amend D.C. Code § 38–2652 (c) to ensure timely access to data from D.C.'s education agencies.

This recommendation will be accomplished when the State Board requests data and the request would be fulfilled within 30 days (or within reason based on the scope of the request); the data would be scrubbed of individuals' identifying information, provided as raw data files accessible in Excel spreadsheets (including a tab containing data notes, definitions, and resources).

This recommendation will be accomplished by increased funding for at least one full-time employee at the State Board who would analyze data and publish reports.

Immediacy/time taken to implement fully

Implementation of this recommendation could begin immediately.

This recommendation should be fully implemented by the end of FY25, allowing time to adequately review and vote on this recommendation, followed by expansion to the State Board's internal budget to allow for hiring a data analyst.

Potential examples of implementation success

The State Board wants to analyze the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on student enrollment. OSSE has student enrollment data from 2016–2022. The State Board believes this data analysis level is crucial to combat enrollment declines in DCPS. The State Board submits a data request to OSSE and receives DCPS student enrollment data from 2016–2022 in 2 to 3 business days per the requested date.

The State Board hears from constituents at a State Board Public Meeting sharing concerns regarding school budget cuts. The State Board agrees that these budget cuts negatively impact school operating functions. To learn more about what is occurring at DCPS schools, the State Board agrees to contact and connect with the DME and OSSE to receive state education budget data, DCPS and PCSB budget data, and school expenditure data across all eight wards. The State Board would receive this data in 2 to 3 business days per the requested date, and the State Board Data Analyst would develop a report for the State Board members. The State Board members would then develop a resolution with the appropriate recommendations to support equity in education funding better.

Recommendation #6

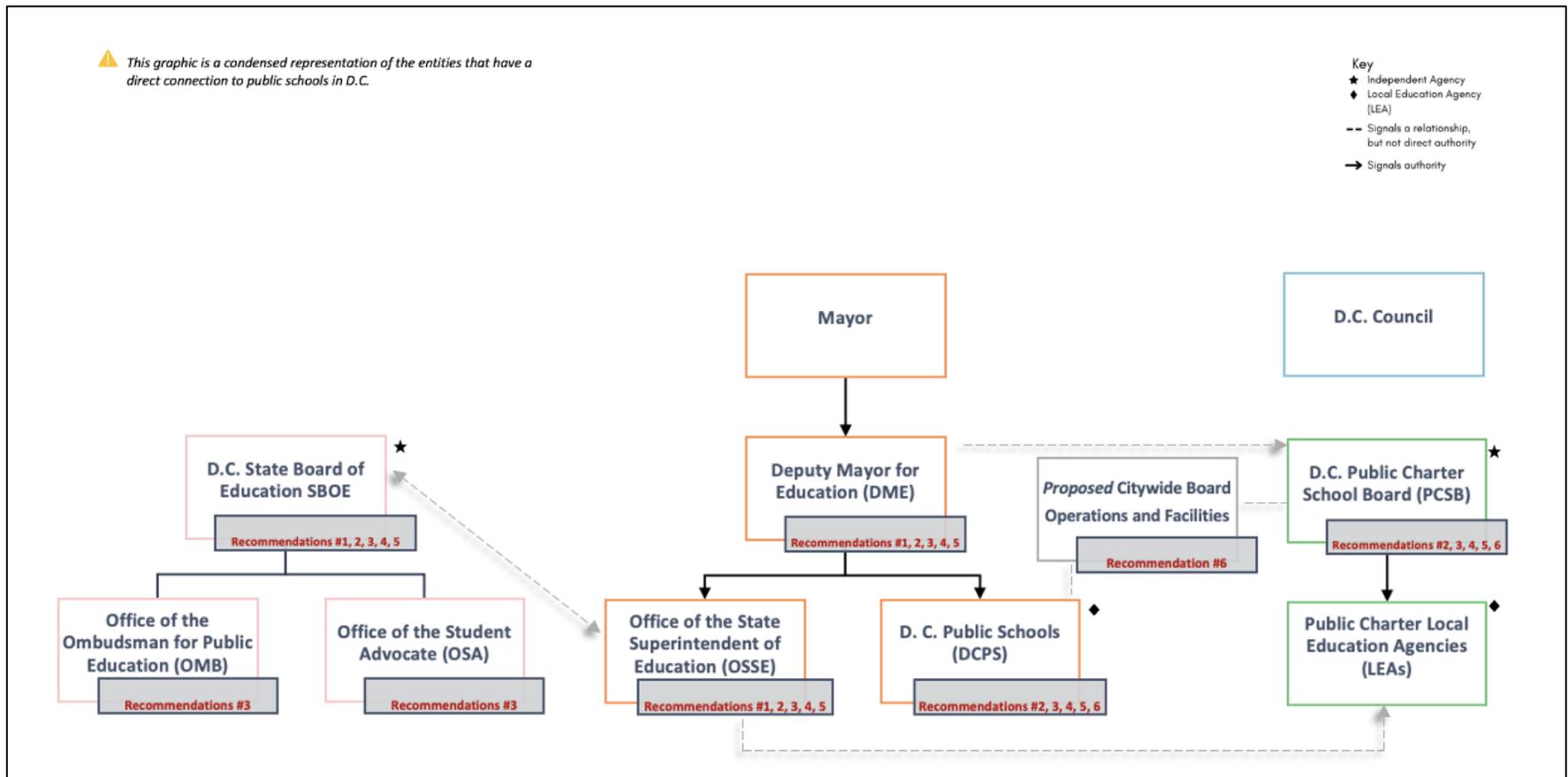
Create a citywide board that oversees DC Public Schools (DCPS) operations and facilities.

CHALLENGING

Context and problem addressed	Community members shared their concerns regarding unsuccessful attempts in contacting the appropriate education agency to address operations and facility issues present in schools. The State Board recognizes a need for a citywide board to help facilitate these local school concerns and ensure solutions are conducted promptly.
Takeaway tie-in and problems addressed	<p>Takeaway #4: Students, educators, and parents/caregivers need a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.</p> <p>Takeaway #5: Community-based engagement by the State Board is key to raising their visibility and leverage as a trusted resource.</p> <p>Takeaway #7: D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control, increasing school autonomy, removing bureaucratic redundancies, etc.).</p>
Considerations for implementation	<p>Adoption of this amendment should fall under D.C. Code Title 38. Educational Institutions, Subtitle VIII. State Level Agencies and Activities</p> <p>The State Board is currently working on a resolution establishing standards that would define what a healthy, safe, and educationally appropriate facility looks like across all public schools. This citywide board should consider adopting the concepts and definitions identified for healthy school facilities in D.C.</p>
Immediacy/time taken to fully implement	<p>Implementation of this recommendation could <i>not</i> be implemented immediately.</p> <p>This recommendation requires several years to research, discuss, and fully fund for successful implementation and execution of its intended roles. This recommendation should be fully implemented between FY26 and FY27.</p>
Potential examples of implementation success	<p>Teachers go before the citywide board to address HVAC issues that have been a consistent issue at their school over the past several months. The citywide board meets and interviews students, educators, and the school leader and identifies the problem as needing immediate remedy. Without delay, the HVAC system—which needed a significant upgrade—is replaced.</p> <p>Students are complaining of the quality of food at their school. They put in a complaint to the citywide board who then visit the school, interview the food service workers and students, and research the food vendor supplying the food. The board finds that the food quality is under-par based on healthy food standards. The board also reviews other schools under the same vendor and finds that other schools are also receiving low-quality food for their students. Steps are taken to remedy the situation.</p>

An abridged version of D.C.’s education system showing agencies impacted by the above recommendations and the proposed citywide board considered in recommendation #6, is featured in Table 5 below.

Table 5: D.C.’s Education Governance Structure (Amended) with Agencies Impacted by Recommendations and Proposed Citywide Board





Exploratory Topics

Aside from the recommendations discussed above, the Board Governance Committee also identified three (3) exploratory topics that, while addressing concerns and issues raised during community outreach, need further research before advancing to the list of recommendations. These exploratory topics, further described below, include expanding the authoritative powers of the State Board while building new structures within the education governance landscape that would further lift the voices of education stakeholders.

The first exploratory topic calls for researching and the **expansion of the State Board’s role to include appointing the State Superintendent of Education, with confirmation from the D.C. Council.** This exploratory recommendation was developed in response to takeaway #7¹⁷. To adopt this exploratory recommendation, the D.C. Council should amend D.C. Code § 38–2652 (a) with language that puts the State Board either in an advisory role for the selection of the State Superintendent of Education to the D.C. Council or as an advisory authority over the selection of the State Superintendent of Education. Should an amendment be adopted, recommendation #2¹⁸ regarding the State Board’s “great weight” should apply to the advisory and/or selection process role of the State Board.

With thoughtful consideration and appropriate research, implementing this exploratory recommendation should not begin immediately. It would take a year, if not more, to explore the ramifications of placing such powers on the current State Board and options where the State Board plays an *advisory* role in selecting the State Superintendent of Education. Another alternative may be meaningful community engagement to identify values needed in appointing a new State Superintendent of Education and developing adequate processes that reflect stakeholder input.

The second exploratory recommendation the D.C. Council should further evaluate is ***creating a structure independent of DCPS that would hear termination appeals from teachers and principals who believe they were terminated because of their views on school and system practices.*** This exploratory recommendation responds to takeaway #4¹⁹, takeaway #5²⁰, and takeaway #7²¹. Adopting this exploratory recommendation would require statutory changes to D.C. Code Title 38. Educational Institutions, Subtitle VIII. State Level Agencies and Activities.

¹⁷ D.C. residents asked to restructure education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control).

¹⁸ D.C. residents want increased clarity on the education system hierarchy and which agency to contact (including specific contact information) for certain issues to improve parent/caregiver engagement.

¹⁹ Students’, educators’, and parent/caregivers’ voices need a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.

²⁰ Community-based engagement by the State Board is key to raising their visibility and leverage as a trusted resource.

²¹ D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control).





This second exploratory recommendation could not be implemented immediately. To ensure adequate research is conducted, roundtables with the public and education stakeholders (especially education governance experts) would be paramount, taking at least a year of information gathering.

The third and final exploratory recommendation the D.C. Council should investigate is *developing structures to improve and allow for participation in advisory capacities for students, caregivers, educators, and community members in a more equitable way*. This exploratory recommendation addresses takeaway #4²² and takeaway #7²³. With the adoption of this exploratory recommendation, no amendments to D.C. Code would be needed. However, to be successful, implementing this exploratory recommendation would require capacity-building within education agencies and collaboration and information sharing across education agencies on meaningful community engagement. This exploratory recommendation would take at least a few years to thoroughly plan, budget for, and execute and could not be implemented immediately.

Conclusion

This report aimed to center the needs of students, educators, school-based leaders, caregivers, and in essence, all communities across D.C. in each of the six (6) recommendations and three (3) exploratory topics provided. This report offered some background information into how the State Board listened to community feedback through outreach and engagement efforts over the past two years and how this feedback was translated into the six (6) recommendations that would transform the current education system into one that is more accountable, transparent, and easily understood by all education stakeholders in D.C.

The State Board is grateful to everyone who joined public engagements, participated in surveys, shared insight in focus groups, or attended meetings to provide their voice. The State Board also thanks the number of partners that have reviewed and provided comments on the content of this report. The State Board now looks forward to sharing this report with the D.C. Council, which reflects community members' concerns, issues, ideas, and experiences.

²² Students', educators', and parent/caregivers' voices need a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.

²³ D.C. residents asked for restructuring education governance and power dynamics (i.e., rethinking mayoral control).





Appendix A: Education Governance Survey Ward-Level Comparison

The following chart compares survey participants’ responses by ward from the Education Governance Survey²⁴.

Question	Ward-Level Comparisons
<p>Question 11 – Familiarity with Education Agencies <i>On a scale from 1 to 5, how well do you feel you understand the roles of the following education agencies in D.C.²⁵?</i></p>	<p>Respondents in Wards 1, 5, 7, and 8 are <i>more likely</i> to report understanding the roles of each of the seven education agencies “very well”. Respondents in Wards 2 and 3 are <i>less likely</i> to report understanding the roles of the education agencies “very well” and <i>more likely</i> to say they understand them “not well at all.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearly one-quarter of respondents (22 percent) from Ward 5 say they understand OSSE “very well,” whereas only 8 percent of respondents from Ward 3 report understanding OSSE “very well” and around one-third of respondents (36 percent) from Ward 2 say they <i>do not</i> understand OSSE well at all. • 15 percent of respondents from Ward 7 report understanding OSA “very well,” whereas less than 2 percent of respondents from Ward 2 and less than 2 percent from Ward 3 report understanding OSA “very well.”
<p>Question 12 – Listing Top Education Priorities <i>Select the top three priorities that should be immediately addressed by the education system in D.C.</i></p>	<p>Respondents in Ward 8 overwhelmingly identify the third aggregate-ranked issue (“bullying and/or violence issues”) as one of their priorities and nearly a quarter (19 percent) report “food quality” as a priority, despite it being lower on the aggregate rankings. Respondents in Wards 3, 5, and 8 are <i>more likely</i> to prioritize “special education needs, IEPs, 504s” as an area in need of address compared to other wards. Respondents in Wards 4, 7, and 8 are <i>less likely</i> than respondents in the other five wards to identify the top aggregate-ranked issue (“program quality in schools”) as one of their education priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44 percent of Ward 8 respondents report “bullying” as an education priority, whereas only 19–30 percent of respondents in other wards report bullying and violence as a top priority. • 27 percent of Ward 8 respondents identify “special education needs” as a priority, compared with 9 percent of Ward 2 residents and 11 percent of Ward 4 residents who report special education as a top priority.

²⁴ D.C. State Board of Education. (2022). *Education Governance Survey Report*. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/rh3n06jftpagu7k/2022-09-07-FINAL-Education%20Governance%20Survey%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

²⁵ *The seven educational agencies listed for this question are D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), Council of the District of Columbia, Office of the Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Public Charter School Board (PCSB), Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), Office of the Student Advocate (OSA), and Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB)*

Question	Ward-Level Comparisons
<p>Question 15 – Where Residents Reach Out <i>Who have you reached out to, or would reach out to, for an education-related issue or question? Select all that apply.</i></p>	<p>Respondents in Wards 1, 7, and 8 are <i>more likely</i> to reach out to OSA for education-related issues or questions than respondents from Ward 3. Respondents in Ward 7 are the <i>most likely</i> to reach out to OMB for education-related issues, compared with respondents in Wards 2 and 3 who are the <i>least likely</i> to reach out to OMB. Respondents in Ward 2 are <i>more likely</i> than respondents in the other seven wards to reach out to Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANC) for education issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8–11 percent of respondents in Wards 1, 7, and 8 would reach out to OSA for education issues, compared with 3 percent of Ward 3 respondents. • 22 percent of Ward 2 respondents would reach out to ANC for education issues, whereas only 7–15 percent of respondents in the other seven wards would reach out to ANC.
<p>Question 16 – Identifying Decision Makers <i>Who do you consider to be the decision-maker(s) for the education system in D.C.? Select all that apply</i></p>	<p>Respondents in Ward 8 are substantially <i>more likely</i> to identify the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB) as one of the main decision-makers for the education system compared with Wards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Respondents in Ward 2 and Ward 3 were much <i>less likely</i> to identify the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) as a main decision-maker compared with the other six wards.²⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 percent of Ward 8 residents identify OMB as being a main decision-maker, whereas 0–4 percent of respondents in Wards 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 identify OMB as a main decision-maker. • Only 4 percent of Ward 2 residents and 12 percent of Ward 3 residents identify PCSB as a main decision-maker, compared with 21–30 percent of residents in the other six wards who identify PCSB as a decision-maker.
<p>Question 17 – Identifying Policy Writers <i>Who do you think writes the policies for schools in D.C.? Select all that apply.</i></p>	<p>Respondents in Wards 2 and 3 are <i>more likely</i> than respondents in Wards 4, 5, 6 and 7 to report “I don’t know” who writes policy for schools in the District. Respondents in Wards 1, 5, and 6 are <i>more likely</i> than respondents in Wards 2 and 3 to identify PCSB as a main policy writer, and respondents in Ward 3 are much <i>more likely</i> than respondents in Wards 1, 4, 7, and 8 to identify DCPS as a main policy writer.</p> <p>17 percent of Ward 3 respondents and 16 percent of Ward 2 respondents report not knowing who the policy writers are for the education system, compared with less than 10 percent of respondents in Wards 4, 5, 6, and 7.</p>

²⁶ Note: There are no public charter schools in Ward three, and few (six) in Ward 2.



Question	Ward-Level Comparisons
<p>Question 19 – Better Governance and Information Sharing <i>Regarding how decisions are made for the education system in D.C., how much improvement needs to be made on the following items (on a scale from 1 to 5)?</i></p>	<p>Across the five issue areas, respondents in Wards 7 and 8 are overall more likely than other wards to identify each issue area as needing “significant improvements.” Compared to the other seven wards, respondents in Ward 8 are <i>most likely</i> to report the top aggregate-ranked issue (“being more transparent with the public about why decisions are made”) as needing significant improvements. Respondents in Wards 7 and 8 are <i>more likely</i> than the other six wards to identify the second top aggregate-ranked issue (“making it easy for the public to provide input”) as an area that needs significant improvements.</p> <p>Nearly three-quarters of respondents (72 percent) from Ward 8 marked “being more transparent” as an area needing “significant improvements,” whereas only 48 percent to 56 percent of respondents in Wards 1–6 marked the area as needing significant respondents.</p>
<p>Question 20 – Improving Engagement with Residents and Community <i>Regarding ways that would make you feel heard by those making decisions for learning and education in D.C., how much improvement needs to be made on the following items (on a scale from 1 to 5)?</i></p>	<p>Compared with the other six wards, respondents in Wards 7 and 8 are substantially <i>more likely</i> to identify the lowest ranked priority areas (“opportunities to speak in-person” and “opportunities to speak virtually”) as being in need of “significant improvements.”</p> <p>42 percent of respondents in Ward 8 and 37 percent of respondents in Ward 7 report “opportunities to speak in-person” as an area needing “significant improvements” whereas only 19–26 percent of respondents in Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 report the area as in need of significant improvements.</p>

Appendix B: Other Community Feedback

This report's recommendations and exploratory topics reflect many community members' concerns, ideas, and feedback during the State Board's outreach efforts. This section highlights other themes that emerged from community outreach efforts during the State Board's 2021 Fall Engagements²⁷, the 2022 Education Governance Survey²⁸, and the 2022 Education Governance Focus Groups²⁹; these themes, while not fully reflected in the six (6) recommendations outlined in the report, provide further insight into the needs, concerns, and ideas community members shared with the State Board.

Participants suggested improvements to the community outreach experience for families and educators in D.C.

- Across community outreach efforts, participants voiced a need for a more streamlined approach to communication, more opportunities to give feedback, and greater transparency for how that feedback is utilized.
- Specifically, to the State Board, focus group participants said community-based engagement is critical to raising their visibility and leverage as a trusted resource. Participants in the focus groups suggested that the State Board should be more visible and physically present in the community, including holding community events. At these events, participants stressed the importance of having members there who can answer constituent questions.
- Some participants said they provided feedback to education surveys and outreach efforts but never received follow-up on how their feedback was used.
- Some participants encouraged in-person outreach and making outreach more accessible to community members who typically are not represented in engagement efforts.

*“There’s always these surveys... we’re piloting a bunch of programs, but we never hear the results. We don’t know who has that data. Who is responsible for that data?” -
2021 State Board Fall Engagement*

“Having equal percentages of communities [sic.] members, parents, teachers, and students involved in education decisions. Understanding that multiple conversations must be had to

²⁷ D.C. State Board of Education (2021). *Fall Engagement Board Governance Notes*. Retrieved from <https://www.dropbox.com/s/oxeb189uo1rwtsk/2021-12-09-NOTES-Fall%20Engagement%20Board%20Governance.pdf?dl=0>

²⁸ D.C. State Board of Education. (2022). *Education Governance Survey Report*. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/rh3n06jftpagu7k/2022-09-07-FINAL-Education%20Governance%20Survey%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

²⁹ Keisler et al. (2022). *Parent/Caregiver Experiences and Perceptions Regarding the DC Education Agencies: Qualitative Research Findings*. Keisler Social & Behavioral Research. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/85gj578ss7rfz25/2022-09-07-FINAL-%20Keisler-Education%20Governance%20Focus%20Group%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

get to a place that all voices [are] heard and that all parties involved have certain ideas put into the policy or decisions.” - Education Governance Survey

“...Have a community-based type of commune with people. That's the engagement you need so you can build that trust factor of the [State Board], and then you can build an alignment of connections with mindsets, thoughts, and desired outcomes together to move the district forward.” – Education Governance Focus Group Participant

Two issues that participants felt should be immediately addressed by D.C.'s education system are 1) program quality in schools and 2) mental health issues

- In the Education Governance Focus Groups, parent participants noted that 1) they were concerned about the quality of the education and curriculum, noting that there seemed to be a heavy focus on English and math because those are the subjects that students are tested on, and a lack of focus on other subjects (e.g., science and technology); and 2) students are facing traumas due to the pandemic and potentially outside of the school, and stressed the need for focusing the “whole child,” rather than just the academic aspect of school. Other parents indicated a need for more behavioral specialists to be available in schools.
- In the Education Governance survey, two other top items that nearly a quarter of respondents (23 percent) selected from a list of education issues were addressing *bullying and/or violence issues*, and *too many tests* overwhelming students.
- Aside from the above needs that should be immediately addressed, many participants from all three community engagement efforts shared that the education system in D.C. should focus on ensuring 1) equitable funding and resources to schools, students, and educators 2) every student has access to a well-rounded education, and 3) improving transparency in school data (including how funds are spent)

“Inequities and disparities across wards, especially when it comes to funding, diverse and well-rounded curriculum, teachers (years of experience, retention).” - 2021 State Board Fall Engagement Participant³⁰

“Fund schools equitably; ensure all children have the same access to quality programs, electives, and mental health supports.” - Education Governance Survey Participant

“I also think socio-emotional [issues are] across the board...because of the pandemic, there is a deficit in terms of just civility, kindness, talking appropriately to your peers, how do we handle when you're frustrated, you're angry, you're disappointed. You know what I'm saying? The kids are lacking this, and they need the support.” – Education Governance Focus Group Participant

³⁰ When asked “What's one issue/concern on which you feel has taken way too much time to address?”



Appendix C: Government Agency Feedback

The State Board is grateful for the feedback provided by the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA), the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB), and the Mayor’s Office of Racial Equity (ORE). The State Board also appreciates the feedback from OSSE, DCPS, DC PCSB, and the DME, who provided a combined response letter (see next page). Their review and feedback do not equate to an endorsement of the recommendations outlined in this report, and any errors within this report are the responsibility of the State Board.





March 8, 2023

To the members of the D.C. State Board of Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recommendations in your report on education governance.

Position Summary

Before commenting on the specific recommendations, we want to express our concern that the State Board of Education (SBOE), based on a small survey of respondents who were not representative of the District by geography or demographics, is putting forward recommendations that would destabilize and disrupt a public school system that has driven significant educational progress over the past 15 years in Washington, DC. While we value public dialogue and constantly seek to learn from a variety of perspectives, we believe such discussions should be grounded in facts and evidence, and that in particular, any ideas for wholesale change should be accompanied not only by deep engagement and debate, but by compelling rationale. In the case of the governance recommendations contained in the SBOE's report, we do not find such compelling evidence. We further cannot find any clear articulation of the specific "problems" these disruptive ideas seek to address – and the report does not make the important connections between your recommendations and the impacts you would expect to see on teaching and learning, the instructional core of our schools, and student outcomes.

Under our education system, with Mayoral accountability and Council oversight, we have increased our investment in education by 80% over the past decade, putting per student funding in DC among the top three in the nation, to support a vibrant system of neighborhood and citywide schools and programs. Enrollment continues to improve, reaching a high point this year when neighboring school systems lost population. The vast majority of our families access free pre-kindergarten for 3- and 4-year olds. Before the pandemic, learning outcomes had improved for all student populations, and progress in DC outpaced progress in comparable districts across the country. Graduation rates have increased by 14% in the past decade. The vast majority of families approved of schools' handling of the pandemic, and education has slid from residents' number one concern to number six. We coordinated across government to safely reopen schools in SY 21-22 and, in SY 22-23, cut the immunization non-compliance rate in half to make schools safer places of learning for the long term. DC should continue to build on this momentum of forward progress.

None of this suggests any of us can be complacent. Quite the opposite is true: we have much to work on together and much to address, in partnership with our families, especially as opportunity gaps have widened during the pandemic. However, we should not engage in disruptive change



for its own sake. We should not throw away the very aspects of the system that have driven our progress. We all have unique roles to play in this improvement journey, and we must focus on those roles, and the best interests of students, to advance. To this end, we urge the State Board to focus on its core functions and the recommendations pertaining to its own scope of authority, of which several emerged from the survey, in service of our shared goals around transparency and increased public awareness and input in education.

Comments on the Report Data and Recommendations

The survey itself on which the report's recommendations are based has several significant flaws. Of the 1,132 people who completed the survey, from a public education system of approximately 96,500 students and a District population of 712,000 residents, Ward 3, which has only 6% of public school enrollment, represented 29% of survey respondents, while Ward 8, which has the highest percentage of public school students, at 23%, was represented in the survey at a rate of 6%. Moreover, more than half the respondents (54%) identified as white and 30% identified as Black, in a school system in which 13% of students are white and 63% of students are Black. 71% of respondents were affiliated with DCPS, and only 25% with public charter schools, in a system of 70 public Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in which approximately half of students are served by DCPS and the other half by public charter schools. The other source of data for these recommendations was a focus group of 22 caregivers. This group was small and similarly unrepresentative, with one third of participants coming from one ward (4). These are just some of the ways in which this small sample on which the recommendations in the report are based is unrepresentative of the population of the DC public school system and the District overall.

Beyond the flaws in the underlying data, this report makes unsound leaps to recommendations that would disrupt and upend our governance structure rather than focusing on areas for improvement within SBOE's own role and scope of authority. For example, the least understood education agencies, according to the survey, are the ones that sit within the SBOE – the Office of the Student Advocate and the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education – with only 12% of respondents knowing the roles of these offices well and over half of respondents rating their understanding of their roles “not well at all.” Only 5-6% of respondents said they have reached out to or would reach out to these offices. It would logically follow that the SBOE should focus on strengthening these offices, their work, and their perception locally, rather than taking on more power from other education agencies with which the public is more familiar. We encourage the SBOE to focus on its current role and the significant areas of growth within them. The recommendation to create a centralized website or education governance hub and community hotline that maps, tracks, and closes community members' education issues under the auspices of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and Office of the Student Advocate (# 3) is the one recommendation in this report that addresses a clear need within SBOE and should be the



type of work on which SBOE focuses its energy in the coming years. Other recommendations in the report would be disruptive and destabilizing and would set our system back.

Recommendations such as authorizing the State Board to initiate policy (#1), approve the opening, closing, and siting of schools (#4), and create a citywide board that oversees DC Public Schools (DCPS) operations and facilities (#6) would lead to dysfunction and confusion among government agencies and our legislative body (the DC Council) and would make decision-making and implementation much more challenging for schools, taking away from a focus on improved services and outcomes for students. These recommendations would add bureaucratic structures that would slow down and complicate decision-making, overreach into existing agencies' decision-making and authority, and create confusion for the decision makers at the agencies and school leaders. Proposals such as #4 and #6 would also create cross-sector inequities and practical and legal concerns. Other proposals, such as providing the State Board with a "great weight" similar to Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) (#2) and expanding the State Board's authority to obtain data upon request from D.C.'s education agencies in a timely way (#5) are unnecessary and duplicative given the existing structures and processes in place, would create an unnecessary burden for agencies such as OSSE and PCSB, and would create tension between education agencies and SBOE rather than continuing the collaborative working relationship currently in place.

Closing Comments

In closing, we urge the State Board to focus on its core duties as outlined in the code and the offices under its purview, including the Office of the Student Advocate and the Ombudsman for Public Education.

We have a streamlined governance system that has yielded strong results – from academic performance to enrollment – over 15 years. The way to engender continued improvement is through evidence-based, targeted investments, and increased coordination, not through dismantling the system we have to give more power to an additional body with its own set of perspectives.

We welcome the opportunity to continue working with the SBOE on the shared goals highlighted in the report of helping families navigate the District's education landscape, equitably elevating caregiver/student voices, making community members feel heard, and improving transparency in education governance decision-making, as well as raising standards for our public education system, in a way that is constructive and effective.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Kihn".

Paul Kihn
Deputy Mayor for Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Grant".

Dr. Christina Grant
State Superintendent of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lewis D. Ferebee".

Dr. Lewis Ferebee
Chancellor, DC Public Schools

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Walker Davis".

Dr. Michelle Walker Davis
Executive Director, DC Public Charter School Board