

Remarks of Board Member Markus Batchelor
ESSA Vote
March 22, 2017

Thank you, Madam President. When I was sworn into this office just a few short months ago, I said that if we believed that the type of support that allowed a kid from Congress Heights to make an improbable journey to this office was necessary to win the future for all of our kids, we needed to demonstrate that commitment not just in words, but in actions. We now find ourselves at one of those crucial moments where our actions will mean so much more than our often well-intentioned words.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives us a great opportunity to invest in the long-term success of the District's students and their families. Ladies and Gentlemen, we are the change we seek and this new law could move us just one step further in ensuring that all the District's students attend safe, welcoming, thriving public schools, whether public or public charter.

For far too long, we have blamed our problems on the overreach of the U.S. Department of Education, but thanks to former President Obama, we finally have a chance of re-writing the failures of No Child Left Behind. ESSA offers a bold new opportunity for the District to move beyond top-down, test-and-sanction based reforms that have failed to help the students of my generation.

But for those opportunities to take root, this government must think big and enact bold accountability standards that

empower educators, hold school leaders accountable and serve the need of all the districts students, including some of our most vulnerable populations.

So, while I am encouraged by the progress that has been made by this body to enhance the framework, my belief is that we can — and must — do more to bring about the shift in priority necessary to achieve our common goals. Our students simply can't afford a half step.

As the only member of this body that represents more charter schools than traditional public schools, a common accountability system that ensures that both halves of my student population get the high-quality education they deserve, is my top priority. But if we are to commit to a common accountability system, let us commit to accountability on the things that matter.

I have often said that Ward 8 children and families had the most to gain from an accountability system that strikes the right balance and prioritizes the right things. I also said that we have the most to lose if we miss the mark and leave out those things that are hard, but necessary, to do.

For far too long, students and families in my ward have bore the brunt of bad policies and failed promises. And now it is the time for that to change. When I ran, I promised Ward 8 residents that I would stand-up for them. I promised to fight against symbols of quality, and fight for the substance of quality. And that is why:

- We must have an adequately weighted metric that holds every school accountable for providing a safe, welcoming and supportive learning environment for students and families.

- We must have an adequately weighted metric that holds every school accountable for ensuring access to a well-rounded curriculum, with robust and diverse course offerings and enrichment activities.
- We must have the urgency it takes to do the research and work necessary to include a high school growth metric— not next decade, but as soon as possible— that gives schools credit for the progress they make with their students, not just for how adept students were when they walked through the door.
- And as the plan evolves, we must commit to meaningful engagement with not just those with the responsibility of executing it, but real, meaningful and sustained engagement with those who will be directly affected: parents and students— and their elected representatives here on the board.

We've come a long way with this plan, but in the interest of all of our students, in every part of our city, we must go farther. The door is wide open for us to not just do what's easy, but to do what's right. When faced with a plan that falls short of our expectations, I've promised the residents of Ward 8 that I would challenge us to do better and where we fail to, to simply say "no" or, at least, "not yet".

Today I am saying "no, not yet" on behalf of the children and families at Hart and King, Ketcham and Anacostia and at Somerset and Excel, KIPP and Thurgood Marshall, who deserve bold investment in improving their learning and their lives. Tomorrow, I'll be ready to get to work once again to challenge all of us in this government and in our schools to not just expect more, but to do more as well. No matter the outcome of tonight's vote, the work continues and I look

forward to being fully engaged in achieving the balance that our children and families need and deserve.