



Testimony on B21-918 “State Board of Education Omnibus Amendment Act of 2016”

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Good afternoon, Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Jack Jacobson, and I am the Ward 2 member and President of the State Board of Education. I am testifying today on behalf of the State Board’s nine elected members and two student representatives in support of B21-918, the “State Board of Education Omnibus Amendment Act of 2016” and the crucial updates it makes to enable us to meet the new federal mandates set forth in the Every Student Succeeds Act.

The proposed amendment has three major sections, one for each of the three offices under the authority of the State Board of Education: the Office of the State Board of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Office of the Student Advocate. Today, I will be focusing my comments on the section of the bill that relates to the Office of the State Board.

Before I do, let me provide some context. The State Board has faced significant structural challenges since gaining autonomy from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in April 2013. Many of these issues were compounded by the addition of the Ombudsman and Student Advocate without accompanying resources to ensure the appropriate establishment and administration of those offices. The State Board is committed to its vital role as education policy leaders and the public’s independent voice. We are further committed to the unique roles that the offices of the Ombudsman and Student Advocate play, particularly in resolving problems for hundreds of students and families.

As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, in December 2015, Congress passed a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act known as the Every Student Succeeds Act or “ESSA”. This legislation initiated one of the largest devolutions of power from the federal government to the states in over a quarter century, and requires us to engage the public in developing new ways of measuring student and school performance. Toward this end, the State Board has been working closely with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to ensure that the District’s new state accountability plan truly reflects the needs of our students, families, teachers and communities. We must become better supports to our schools, rather than hammers of compliance. Furthermore, we cannot reward or punish our schools based solely on reading and math scores. A rich education involves so much more than that. Our goal should be to reach every student where he or she is, and provide the education each one needs to succeed.

For the State Board to fulfill this duty, and have a new accountability system in place for the 2017-18 school year, our statutory authority must be updated to reflect the new federal law. Lines 24-56 on pages one and two of the bill adjust the authority of the State Board to mirror the language in ESSA.

Currently, DC Official Code § 38-2652, paragraph five, contains two items that are no longer requirements under federal law: “adequate yearly progress” and “highly qualified teachers.” The elimination of these subparagraphs will eliminate confusion.



Paragraph five provides a broader definition of proficiency that moves beyond just “achievement” to include student knowledge, understanding, and skills. This change is necessary to reflect the fact that student success means more than a test score.

The final change ensures that our statewide plan will provide our schools with interim and long-term goals so that every school is reaching for the greatness we know their students can achieve. This new terminology comes directly from ESSA as passed by Congress and signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015.

The Omnibus’ proposed changes to paragraph 6 have, I believe, been misunderstood as an expansion of the State Board’s authority. The State Board currently is empowered to “Approve standards for accreditation and certification of teacher preparation programs of colleges and universities.” ESSA gives states incentives to create alternative teacher preparation academies outside of universities. The proposed change in the Omnibus is intended to maintain the Council’s decision that approval of standards for teacher preparation programs should reside with the State Board. It would be confusing if there were two different standards for teacher preparation programs.

Paragraph seven reflects the language changes within ESSA, from a “state accountability plan” to a “statewide accountability system.” I should note that ESSA requires the state education agency to engage in “meaningful consultation” with stakeholders such as the State Board. The State Board is committed to ensuring that the District meets this high bar for community participation in the process. We have established an ESSA committee, chaired by my Ward 3 colleague, Ruth Wattenberg, to spearhead this work, participated in OSSE stakeholder meetings, and held forums in all eight wards to solicit input from the community. In addition, we’ve had discussions and received comments from a number of parents, teachers, and other members of the public.

Further changes to the subsections of paragraph seven continue the rewording of the Code to mirror the changes ESSA provided in the federal legislation.

Paragraph twelve of the Code provides the State Board with the authority to approve the annual report cards for schools. ESSA requires that states make considerable changes to their annual report cards. These revisions will be a priority for the State Board once the accountability system is adopted; the new report cards do not need to be published until December 2018.

I want to talk in a little detail about the new paragraph on lines 60-62. The text reads, “The Board shall have access to the public comments submitted during a public comment period on all policies, regulations, or other official actions that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education submits to the Board for its approval.” In discussing this provision with stakeholders and residents, I have found most are shocked that the State Board is being asked to make decisions on regulations and other matters without having the benefit of reviewing the comments provided by the public. Put simply, Mr. Chairman, this is an important provision and it's just good government.



Finally, Mr. Chairman, the State Board is requesting that portions of the bill related to the authority of the State Board be considered in an emergency and temporary version. Because of the Congressional review requirement and the ending of the Congressional and Council period, we are concerned that the regular legislative process will not be complete by our winter deadline for completing a new state accountability plan in time for the 2017-18 school year, as ESSA requires.

We very much appreciate all of the work you and your staff have put into this legislation. Our mutual dedication to making our schools better every single day is reflected in the trust put in us by residents. The State Board is committed to promoting equity and excellence in every facet of DC public education so that every student has opportunities for success.

I welcome any questions you might have.

