



## FY2018 Performance Oversight Hearing

Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole and Committee on Education  
Phil Mendelson and David Grosso, Chairmen

February 12, 2019

Ruth Wattenberg, President, Ward 3  
Markus Batchelor, Vice President, Ward 8  
Ashley MacLeay, At-Large  
Dr. Emily Gasoi, Ward 1  
Jack Jacobson, Ward 2  
Dr. Frazier O’Leary, Ward 4  
Zachary Parker, Ward 5  
Dr. Jessica Sutter, Ward 6  
Karen Williams, Ward 7  
Tatiana Robinson, Student Representative  
Marjory Alicea, Student Representative

John-Paul Hayworth, Executive Director  
Paul Negron, Public Affairs Specialist  
Matthew Repka, Policy Analyst  
Alexander Jue, Policy Analyst  
Rhoma Battle, Budget & Operations Specialist  
Lanita Logan, Staff Assistant



Good morning, Chairmen Grosso and Councilman White. My name is Ruth Wattenberg. I have the honor of serving as the President and Ward 3 member of the DC State Board of Education. I also want to acknowledge Markus Batchelor, the State Board's Vice President, who I will be relying on this year.

I want to take the opportunity to thank my predecessor, Karen Williams, for her outstanding work as President for the past two years and Vice President for two years before that. Likewise, my thanks to Jack Jacobson, who was most recently our Vice President and President before that. The State Board is a stronger agency because of their leadership.

Thanks also to John Paul Hayworth, our Executive Director, and the State Board staff for their work to ensure that the voices of DC residents are part of every policy discussion, something we hope leads to improved policy and an ever-stronger commitment to making available the information and data that allows for democratic participation.

I am joined today by our Ombudsman for Public Education and our Chief Student Advocate. These offices perform vital functions helping DC families make sure that students' best interests are served. I was very sad to see our founding Ombudsman, Joyanna Smith, leave last year. I am very eager to work with our newly-hired Ombudsman, Serena Hayes, who you will hear from shortly. We all owe immense thanks and gratitude to Faith Gibson Hubbard, who agreed to take on the role of Interim Ombudsman in 2018 on top of her job as Chief Student Advocate and to oversee program and staff in both offices. She did a fantastic job. Thank you, Faith, on behalf of all of us in the offices and the students and families that you have helped. And thanks to the staff of both offices for their tremendous work.

We are pleased to be here today to highlight the important work of the State Board and its offices over the past year. As you know, the State Board is a vital, independent voice in DC education policy. Our members are directly elected by the people of the District to serve four-year terms, to focus solely on education-related matters, and to bring their concerns, views, and needs into the city's education discussions. The State Board also selects two student representatives each year to join the Board's elected members and to chair a Student Advisory Committee. This year, that student voice is provided by Tatiana Robinson from Frank W. Ballou High School and Marjoury Alicea from Capital City Public Charter School. They provide us with terrific information from the classroom floor. Recently, I was at a Student Advisory committee meeting and was frankly stunned to hear how nearly every one of them had recently been taught by a long-term substitute teacher, due to mid-year teacher turnover. I encourage all District public high school students to apply for our Student Representative and Student Advisory Committee positions this spring for the coming school year.

As the State Board moves into its second decade, our members and staff remain committed to providing residents of the District with the best possible outcomes for students. Since our last performance oversight hearing, the State Board has continued to expand our engagement with local families, teachers, students, residents, policy leaders, and District agencies to solicit feedback on how policy decisions affect the daily lives of our public education stakeholders. We livestream every working session, task force meeting, and public meeting of the State Board to further the impact of our work. We have launched a blog for members of the State Board and the staff to report on activities they



engage in throughout the community. Our reach will continue to grow in the coming years as well, thanks to the work of our members and staff.

### **Now, a few words about some of our key work in the past year:**

#### **On the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):**

In December 2018, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) released the first iteration of the District's school report card, including the new 1-5 STAR rating system. For the first time, information about our public and public charter schools can be compared on a single website. I want to thank Superintendent Kang and her team for their hard work and dedication. The school report card was influenced not only by input from the public and the SBOE, but also our hard-working ESSA Task Force members. They have been meeting monthly for almost 18 months and their insights have been invaluable. The ESSA Task Force is currently working on recommendations that they will provide to the State Board in June.

It is no secret that I have been consistent in my calls for OSSE and the State Board to continue our work on the statewide accountability plan and its metrics. I strongly believe we can and should do better in ensuring that our system does not penalize schools for working with the students who are most in need. I, and other members of the State Board, are concerned that our current STAR framework may do just that. I am committed to working with all stakeholders to evaluate our system and to recommend changes if needed.

#### **On Teacher & Principal Retention and Turnover:**

Last summer, the State Board contracted with education researcher Mary Levy to gather information related to teacher and principal retention in the District of Columbia. The report was released this past October. The results should shake us. In our highest poverty schools, roughly a third of our teachers leave the school every year. In Ward 8 schools, the five-year turnover rate is 78%. DCPS' turnover rates regularly exceed those of comparable urban districts by 10 points or more. Principal turnover is also way too high, though it must be acknowledged that the high rate of principal turnover we see here --25%--is not unique to DC. Prior to this report, despite many rumors and complaints about high turnover, the relevant data was not transparently available and urgent attention was not paid to the issue.

Since releasing the report, the issue has generated concerned coverage in the local media and has been named by our new Deputy Mayor for Education as a major concern. It is now on the radar screen, in a way it hadn't been before. We look forward to working with other education leaders in the District to find ways to address the problem, and we look forward to working with them to do so.

That kind of work—raising an issue from the grassroots and combining it with policy expertise—embodies a key purpose of this State Board: To assure that in this city--where the institutional and mayoral voice can be overwhelming--outside voices can still get a serious hearing. Our local newspaper says that democracy dies in darkness. So too: educational reform and improvement withers if it's not



held to account. By bringing outside voices into the process, we can combat the insularity, concern for reputation and over-cautiousness that is natural to all agencies.

When we released the teacher and principal report in October, it contained a number of recommendations including the establishment of a standard practice of regularly reporting teacher and principal data, in partnership with our schools, so that we know not only who our teachers are, but their reasons for leaving and where they are going. This information is critical in designing systems to support the needs of our school staff

In November 2018, the State Board hosted a public forum related to our work on this issue. I want to thank Scott Goldstein and EmpowerEd for working with us on this effort. The forum resulted in specific recommendations from the public for the State Board to consider. In 2019, we will continue our work in this space and will likely provide recommendations for further action to the Mayor, Council, and others by the end of the calendar year.

**Closing**

In addition to our work on ESSA and retention, we plan to continue our work with OSSE on Credit Recovery and on the recommendations from our High School Graduation Requirements Task Force. OSSE is a close partner with the State Board. We greatly appreciate Superintendent Kang and her team’s commitment to a positive relationship between our agencies.

The primary function of the State Board is to approve and advise on education policies that best serve our city’s students, with significant input and engagement from our constituents: in short, to be a voice for District residents. Our continued oversight and involvement in the District education landscape is vital, and we are pleased to do this work.

We are glad to have the Council as an essential partner in these efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions.

