



FY2017 Performance Oversight Hearing

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Education
David Grosso, Chairman

February 15, 2018

Karen Williams, President, Ward 7
Jack Jacobson, Vice President, Ward 2
Ashley Carter, At Large
Laura Wilson Phelan, Ward 1
Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3
Lannette Woodruff, Ward 4
Mark Jones, Ward 5
Joe Weedon, Ward 6
Markus Batchelor, Ward 8
Tallya Rhodes, Student Representative
Tatiana Robinson, Student Representative

John-Paul Hayworth, Executive Director
Paul Negron, Public Affairs Specialist
Matthew Repka, Policy Analyst
Maria Salciccioli, Senior Policy Analyst



Good morning, Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee on Education. My name is Karen Williams, and I have the honor of serving as the President and Ward 7 member of the DC State Board of Education (State Board). I am joined today by the staffs of the State Board, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Office of the Student Advocate. We are pleased to be here today to highlight the important work of the State Board of Education and its offices over the past year.

I want to take the opportunity to thank every member of the staff of the State Board for their incredible work this year. Our successes as an organization come from the hard work and long hours you put in alongside the elected members of the State Board. I also want to thank the staffs of the Offices of the Ombudsman and Student Advocate. These offices perform vital functions serving District families and ensure that the best interest of the student is at the forefront in decisions being made at the school level.

The State Board is an essential independent voice in education policy for the citizens of the District of Columbia. Our members are directly elected by the people of the District to serve four-year terms and to focus solely on education-related matters that reflect the views and needs of our constituents across the District. The Board also selects two students each year to join the elected members; this year, students are represented by Tallya Rhodes from H.D. Woodson High School and Tatiana Robinson from Frank W. Ballou High School.

2017 was the State Board's tenth year after the passage of the Public Education Reform Amendment Act, also known as PERAA, that consolidated control of the education system under the Mayor. We appreciate the Committee's support and confidence in us as an independent agency as we continue to learn and grow into the role that was laid out for us in PERAA. There have been some growing pains, as the Committee is aware, but we are steadfast in the knowledge that the services we provide to residents of the District are sorely needed.

Since our last performance oversight hearing, the State Board has expanded on its commitment to partner and engage with local parents, teachers, students, policy leaders, District agencies and community members in efforts to solicit feedback on how policy decisions affect the daily lives of our public education stakeholders. We broadcast every meeting of the State Board and of our task forces live on social media 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. Our "reach" will continue to grow in the coming years as well.

Every Student Succeeds Act

As I testified last year, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the State Board have been collaborating to create a new comprehensive and consistent way to measure the progress our schools and students are making from year to year. The Board approved the District's Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, State Plan in March 2017, and under its requirements, we have made great strides in changing our accountability system into one that is not entirely focused on standardized tests. I want to reiterate another point I made last year about the approved State Plan: it is not perfect, and it is not static. Inherently, what works for one school, or one student, will not necessarily work



for others. But the plan does finally offer families an opportunity to compare both traditional public schools and charter schools directly, apples to apples. The State Board has appointed a task force, led by Ward 4 Representative Dr. Lannette Woodruff, on ESSA that will advise the State Board and to OSSE on recommended next steps for implementing the State Plan. The task force will review a variety of education information, including data from pilot programs that the State Board requested prior to approval of the plan.

The task force also played a pivotal role in OSSE and the State Board's work developing a new school report card for the District's public and public charter schools. Task force members hosted focus groups across the city to gather feedback on the elements that should be included on the school report card. The content proposal reflects significant public input, and I want to thank OSSE for their partnership. The proposal, which can be found on our website, will unify the city's myriad scattered information sources into a single resource where parents can learn about schools in a consistent and comparable way. I want to take a moment to publicly thank the members of our ESSA task force for their work thus far. Task force members have given hundreds of hours of their time and we very much appreciate their dedication.

High School Graduation Requirements

Last summer, the State Board launched another task force under the leadership of Ward 1 Representative Laura Wilson Phelan and Ward 8 Representative Markus Batchelor, with the goal of reviewing, analyzing and, as necessary, making thoughtful, implementable recommendations to adjust DC's high school graduation requirements for all DCPS and public charter school students. Like the District's school-aged population, half of the members of the High School Graduation Taskforce live or work east of the Anacostia River. With the help of our staff, the task force has conducted focus groups, learned from local and national experts, and researched best practices for high school and postsecondary success, working to make recommendations that ensure DC graduates are prepared for college, careers, and civic engagement. As you are well aware, Mr. Chairman, news reports about graduation irregularities at District high schools were published in late 2017, and the final report on the scandal was issued just a few weeks ago. This week, the task force identified its next steps in light of the investigations.

The primary function of the 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 work on our constituents' behalf.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Education Committee, the DC State Board of Education is committed to the success of every student in the District. Our members and our staff works tirelessly to reduce barriers and empower students, parents and educators. We are glad to have the Committee as an essential partner in that work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you might have.

