



Performance Oversight Testimony Council Committee of the Whole March 16, 2021

Good morning Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council Committee of the Whole. My name is Zachary Parker and I have the honor to serve as the Ward 5 Representative and President of the State Board of Education. I am pleased to provide testimony today on behalf of the nine elected members, two student representatives, and six fantastic staff members of the State Board about our performance as an agency over the past year. The State Board is composed of three separate independent offices, the State Board, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Office of the Student Advocate. Ombudsman Serena Hayes and Chief Student Advocate Dan Davis will be providing their own testimony, so I will largely restrict my remarks to the State Board's work.

Like the rest of the District Government, our agency has been changed remarkably due to the global pandemic. I am proud to report that the State Board pivoted to the new virtual landscape with aplomb, altering our activities rapidly to ensure that we continue to serve District families. We could not have done this without the incredible State Board staff who made the transition feel seamless from the Board's perspective. This includes moving swiftly to virtual platforms for our official meetings enabling many more residents to interact with the State Board, coordinating a phone response system where staff are able to speak with families from the safety of their own homes, and launching a new social media-based platform to host town halls and informational sessions. Mr. Chairman, in short, the State Board has taken on this new challenging environment and we intend to continue many of these innovations once we return to our physical office.

As outlined in our responses to the questions provided prior to this hearing, the State Board has experienced a 288 percent increase in public witness testimony since 2019. We believe this is due to members' engagement in their Wards; creative, student-centered approaches like our lunchtime social media chats and student-led town halls; and our covering issues most relevant to families, from LEA learning plans to how students with disabilities are being served to teacher turnover. The SBOE is charged with being a conduit for constituent voice. Over the past year, members have made it a priority to engage voices that are less likely to be heard in policy conversations. At least in part as a result of these efforts, I am pleased to report that 75 percent of our public witnesses were first-time commenters in 2020. Further, the State Board has amplified these voices by compiling testimony with summaries for other agencies including the Council to consider in their own work. This work will also continue in the future.

The State Board has also made a number of sacrifices over the past year to assist with pandemic related budget reductions. In total, the mayor requested over \$100,000 in mid-year reductions from the agency's FY2021 budget and over \$600,000 in reductions in FY22 from the State Board's approved Need for Appropriations. It may seem small in the overall District budget, but the approved FY2021 budget for non-personnel services is less than \$360,000 total for all three



offices. These funds are vital to the continuation of the State Board’s functions and activities. In FY21, we asked our staff to forgo salary adjustments despite the new challenges imposed on them by the pandemic. This level of sacrifice is unsustainable if we expect to retain our essential staff who make it possible to effectively serve our constituents.

We are aware that the State Board is not alone in making sacrifices this past year. As you know, we submitted a Budget Priority letter in February laying out a number of priorities the State Board is recommending that the mayor fund. I’ve attached a copy of the letter to this testimony. We look forward to working with the Mayor Bowser and the Council as we enter the FY2022 budget process not only for our agency, but for the education sector.

The State Board has been grateful for the Council’s support of our research agenda over the past two years, providing funding that has permitted us to shine a light on pressing issues that impact the quality of education students receive, such as the causes of teacher turnover and the need to revise outdated social studies standards, and more. Based on findings from our research on teacher turnover, the State Board drafted legislation, that would broaden the authority of our sister agency, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to collect and publish data on the District’s teacher workforce. We strongly believe that ensuring this data is collected and publicly available is an important step. The State Board’s Educator Practice Committee is likely to review the legislation in the coming months and may recommend its reintroduction.

An extension of this work and our efforts to ensure every student has access to a well-rounded education is our All-Teacher Survey and Report. The State Board vote on adopting the report next week and we will ensure the Committee receives a copy of the approved report, but I do want to preview a few results for you today.

- **Teacher Departure and Pandemic** - Almost half of teachers (43.4 percent) reported that they have considered leaving the profession as a result of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic – with teachers who have been teaching 6–10 years indicating the highest consideration (53.5 percent), as well as those teaching in Ward 3. Among races, Black and African American teachers reported the lowest consideration (41.9 percent).
- **Passion for Teaching** - Teachers continue to show passion for teaching. In the March 2021 All-Teacher Survey, teachers responded positively to definitely wanting a career in teaching, to teaching being the ideal profession for them, and to not being disappointed that they entered the teaching profession. These findings are similar to sentiments shared in the March 2020 Teacher Retention Survey Report that found over 86 percent of departed teachers were “passionate about teaching”, but the majority did not feel they received adequate support from their school or their LEA.
- **Intention to Quit Teaching** - Scores for teachers in the District for the Intent to Quit (i.e., “I think about quitting the teaching profession”, “I intend to quit the teaching profession”, “I expect to move into another profession”.) scale were higher than the comparison values.





There were 59 teachers (5.6 percent of the sample) who strongly agreed with the statement “I intend to quit the teaching profession”.

These results may be troubling, but we are hopeful that they will also empower the Council and our schools and LEAs to open a dialogue with teachers about how we can better support them through the pandemic and beyond.

This year, the State Board, in partnership with OSSE, began the review and update of the District’s statewide social studies standards, which have not been updated since 2006. This work was grounded in the State Board’s 2019 commitment to developing social studies standards that were “culturally inclusive and anti-racist, impart important social studies content in the early grades, strengthen student knowledge of democratic principles and values, and promote civic engagement.” To conduct this substantive review, the State Board convened a 26-member Social Studies Standards Advisory Committee (SSSAC) that solicited public input on social studies in the District and drafted 19 guiding principles. A copy of the guiding principles is attached to this testimony. The State Board looks forward to its continued work and partnership with OSSE and their Technical Writing Committee over the coming year, so that the newly revised standards will be ready for implementation at the beginning of the 2022–23 school year.

I also want to emphasize the State Board’s work to operationalize our commitment to equity. The State Board’s Equity Statement acknowledges that “institutional racism and inequitable policies have contributed to uneven outcomes and opportunity gaps for various student groups. The State Board believes all students deserve access to high-quality instruction and necessary support to meet their full potential according to a range of academic and 21st-century learning standards.” But having a strong statement is not enough; the State Board also developed and adopted an Equity Framework to inform our work and advocacy. For example, the framework guides members to prioritize:

- Improving outcomes for students designated as at-risk through high-quality instruction and necessary support.
- Increasing the representation of groups that have been historically marginalized in the District’s teacher and administrator workforce and through the functions of the State Board.
- Expanding access to culturally relevant pedagogy within DC schools and anti-racist professional development opportunities for D.C. educators and State Board staff.

In practice, the State Board now requires the creation of an equity impact statement for each of its proposed resolution that explains how the resolution advances equity in the District of Columbia prior to consideration.

Part of this commitment also includes correcting imbalances between the three offices that comprise the State Board. All three of our offices are underfunded and under resourced for the scope of our work, but this lack is felt particularly within the Offices of the Ombudsman and





Student Advocate. These offices provide vital direct services to families, and we anticipate they both will serve as critical levers in the District’s citywide efforts to respond to family needs while reopening schools. We strongly urge the Council to identify additional full time employee positions for each office so that they can serve more families especially during this time of increased need for student and family supports.

Mr. Chairman, as you can see, the State Board has had a busy year and we are not slowing our pace. So far in 2021, we have overhauled our committee structure, adding new standing committees and focusing our efforts where they are most needed. Our committees focus on assessments and accountability, education standards, educator practice, and the variety of issues members choose to advocate for that will bolster student learning. Each committee has been tasked to develop a work plan for consideration by the State Board by the end of the month. Once completed, we are happy to share the consolidated work plan with the Committee as well as the public. We have also established a task force focused on conducting a needs assessment of schools amid reopening and elevating what is actually working that we might recommend scaling citywide. Additionally, we have established an ad-hoc committee focused on DC’s governance structure, which will 1) produce research about how our system compares to other cities and states, and 2) engage the broader community for input. Finally, we have also partnered with Johns Hopkins University’s DEI Collective to help improve access to SBOE fellowship opportunities to students from underrepresented communities.

Much more about our activities can be found in the responses we submitted to the Committee or in our annual report, so I will close with a few additional thoughts. The world has been in turmoil for the last year because of the pandemic, but for many of our students, trauma is an all too “normal” experience. Generational racism, poverty, and violence leave lasting scars on our children. We must do more to provide for their social, emotional, and mental health. SEL cannot be a minor part of schooling; we must weave it throughout the education system, ensuring that every child feels loved and welcomed in their schools and that they have the tools they need to succeed.

Further, no students should fear their walk to school. Violence is on the increase in our city, and it is preventing students from even walking into the school building and, when they do make it through the doors, they are unable to fully participate in their education. We must do better, now, to provide safe access to schools, including expanding safe passage, but also taking a comprehensive look at how to reform our public safety agencies and their presence in our schools. We urge the Council to refer to the State Board’s resolution on this subject. A copy of which is attached to this testimony.

Finally, I want to thank the staff of the State Board on the record for their dedication and hard work. Alex Jue, Darren Fleischer, Caitlin Peng, Milayo Olufemi, Rhoma Battle, and John-Paul Hayworth are without doubt one of the best teams in District Government and the State Board is indebted to them for their work on our behalf.





Mr. Chairman, I am happy to respond to any questions the Committee may have for me at this time.

