



Testimony of Dr. Jessica Sutter
Ward 6 Representative and President
FY2021 Performance Oversight Hearing
DC Council Committee of the Whole
March 3, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Members of the Council and staff, my name is Dr. Jessica Sutter, and I am the Ward 6 Representative and President of the DC State Board of Education. I am pleased to be here today to provide the Council with a report of the actions of the State Board over the past year to make education in the District more equitable, extend opportunities for students, enhance our teacher workforce, and modernize education standards.

The State Board is a small agency with limited direct authority over statewide education issues. The nine elected members and four appointed student representatives focus efforts through a committee structure that enables the State Board to identify and recommend policy and regulatory changes to continuously seek to improve access to quality educational opportunities for all DC students. Our current committees, Accountability & Assessment, Advocacy & Outreach, Education Standards, Educator Practice & School Support, Education Governance, Student Advisory, and Administration, were designed to provide the public with access to our work and to provide a space for elevation, evaluation, and examination of research on these topics. The State Board is ably served by a small, but dedicated staff who work very hard to provide support and expertise to the agency's work.

Our responses to the performance oversight questions provide details for the accomplishments of the agency, but I would like to take a minute to review some of the highlights.

First, we have been working in partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) to revise social studies standards in the District for nearly two years. Current social studies standards in DC are very out of date. The State Board and our Social Studies Standards Advisory Committee have called for revised D.C. Social Studies Standards which recognize that the world our students are growing up in is—more than ever before—globally interconnected and culturally diverse. District students need the knowledge, skills, experiences, and mindsets that will prepare them for informed and engaged citizenship and careers in this globalized world. New draft standards that will be publicly released by OSSE later this month will provide for a culturally-inclusive and anti-racist approach to social studies, impart rigorous content in the early grades, strengthen student knowledge of democratic principles and values, and promote civic engagement.

The State Board also marked a significant milestone in its work to reshape school accountability with the passage of a resolution (SR22-1, *Recommendations Related to STAR Framework and DC School Report Card*) in January 2022 that contains recommendations related to our statewide accountability system. These recommendations came after many engagements with the public, researchers, and other stakeholders. We are encouraged by the response from State Superintendent





Grant that OSSE is committed to working with the State Board to develop a proposal for changes to the system by July 2022.

One of the reasons that the State Board exists is to ensure that residents of the District have a direct line into statewide education policy development and approval. In order to keep that relationship between the agency and the public strong throughout the many challenges presented by the pandemic, the State Board has extended its virtual posture for public meetings and committee meetings. The State Board has also begun to develop meeting summary videos to pair with update newsletters and planned parallel in-person/virtual engagement opportunities to allow for maximum public participation. Through the State Board's current engagement and meeting structure, we have heard directly from constituents about bullying, COVID recovery efforts and mitigation, safe passage, building maintenance, and other issues important to our residents.

The State Board also has one of the most dynamic student engagement processes in District Government. To our knowledge, we are the only government agency that requires student input and comment on policy matters. Further, I am excited to announce that the State Board has doubled the number of student representatives and, on the recommendation of our Student Advisory Committee (SAC), evaluates the applicants for student representatives individually as well as jointly to ensure a broad diversity of experience. This evaluation, recommended by the Student Representatives, ensures that the Student Representatives as a group provide a diversity of experience and representation of student voice. The State Board also recently updated its bylaws to equalize Student Representative votes in our committees. For years, the State Board has treated its student representatives as equals in all things except their vote. While District law prevents us from equalizing their votes at the full Board level, we are confident that this new ability to vote in committees will further expand student voice in our work.

The State Board has also continued its work to call attention to issues within our teacher workforce. As the Committee is aware, the State Board has annually produced a report detailing teacher turnover. This report has shown some improvement over time in the overall retainment of teachers, but the data clearly shows much more should be done to examine the reasons teachers are leaving their classrooms. Anecdotal evidence from around the country seems to indicate that we may face a crisis next school year as teachers, burnt out by the pandemic, leave the profession entirely.

I want to take a moment to speak about our sister offices, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and the Office of the Student Advocate. I am deeply grateful to Ms. Hayes, Mr. Davis, and their staff for their tireless work on behalf of District residents. The State Board is proud to provide administrative and budget support to these independent and neutral resources. We urge the Council to continue to ensure these offices have the resources they need to continue and expand this vital work.

I thank the Committee for this chance to share the work of the State Board and I look forward to any questions you may have for me.

