



Testimony of Eboni-Rose Thompson  
Ward 7 Representative and President  
FY2023 Performance Oversight Hearing  
D.C. Council Committee of the Whole  
February 27, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the D.C. Council, and staff. My name is Eboni-Rose Thompson, and I am the Ward 7 Representative and President of the D.C. State Board of Education (State Board). I am pleased to be here today to provide the D.C. 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 nine (9) elected members and four (4) appointed Student Representatives. We focus our efforts through a committee structure that enables our agency to identify and recommend policy and regulatory changes that will continuously improve access to quality educational opportunities for all D.C. students. The State Board, through a diverse slate of resolutions, brings attention to education issues that we know profoundly affect students and families across the District. As the only elected body for public education in the District, the State Board continued our leadership over the last year by amplifying community voice, enhancing interagency collaboration, expanding our reach and visibility, and creating opportunities for deeper student engagement in our work.

**Amplifying Community Voice**

The State Board held eleven (11) public meetings, twelve (12) working sessions, twenty-eight (28) committee meetings, and nearly 30 community engagement meetings last year. We received over 205 pieces of testimony on various topics, including updating and improving the DC School Report Card, school-based mental health, education governance, attendance, public safety, out-of-school time programming, and more.

We take feedback from the community to guide our actions seriously. For example, at our May 2023 public meeting, State Board members heard testimony from a local high school student living with epilepsy. The student urged the State Board to consider passing a resolution that would help make schools in the District safer for children with epilepsy. A DCPS teacher and parent provided additional testimony, highlighting the importance of ensuring school staff are trained to respond to seizures. At the June 2023 public meeting, State Board members voted unanimously to adopt *SR23-6, On Recommendations Related to Seizure Safe Schools*, which urged the D.C. Council to develop and pass legislation that would incorporate tools, training, and resources recommended by the Epilepsy Foundation to prepare educators for seizures occurring in their classrooms.

After passage SR23-6 passed, Ward 6 Representative Brandon Best—the sponsoring State Board member—worked with council members on potential legislation. On November 13, D.C.





Councilmembers Charles Allen and Robert White introduced Bill 25-571, *Seizure-Safe Schools Amendment Act of 2023*, which included the five (5) key components recommended by the Epilepsy Foundation and featured in SR23-6:

1. Requiring school personnel to complete a seizure recognition and first-aid response training;
2. Mandating that the Seizure Action Plan is made part of the student’s file and made available for school personnel and volunteers responsible for the student;
3. Ensuring that any FDA-approved medication prescribed by the treating physician is administered to the student living with epilepsy;
4. Educating and training students about epilepsy and first-aid response; and
5. Including a Good Samaritan clause.

In another example, at our July 2023 public meeting, members unanimously passed SR23-8, *On Ensuring Safe and Reliable School Transportation for Students with Disabilities*, created in response to a student's and his mother's public testimony. This resolution included prioritizing and dedicating resources to hiring more bus drivers and making progress toward implementing an application to allow parents and students to track their buses. Hence, parents and family members would know when the student arrived (or not). SR23-8 also recommended that the wait time for students increase to five (5) minutes to avoid students being left out of the bus services. The State Board embodies its role as D.C.’s public voice in education through these examples and many more.

### **Enhancing Interagency Collaboration**

The State Board is committed to strengthening interagency collaboration, coordination, and communication. Over the past year, our collective efforts have been focused on completing essential tasks, such as revising the social studies standards, approving the nation’s first-ever menstrual health standards, and re-envisioning the DDC School Report Card with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Specifically, the State Board worked with OSSE to extend the public comment period for the draft social studies standards. Additionally, for the menstrual health standards, we urged OSSE to create a public comment and provide extensive feedback rooted in the public testimony we received at public meetings.

To strengthen our partnership with OSSE, we co-launched the Education Standards Review Interagency Working Group. The State Board and OSSE staff collaborated to develop an agreed-upon process for the agencies to use when updating academic standards in the future. Both agencies used lessons learned from creating the menstrual health standards and revising the social studies standards to guide their recommendations, which were presented to the State Board members at the October 2023 Working Session. It is with this spirit of cooperation and coordination that the State Board and OSSE will use as we work to finalize and approve the District’s first set of financial literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) standards later this year.





The final area I want to spotlight under interagency collaboration is the State Board’s establishment of the D.C. Healthy School Facilities Network (HSFN) Committee. This committee was comprised of representatives from the State Board, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), DC Public Schools (DCPS), D.C. Council, George Washington University, the 21st Century School Fund, Mary’s Center, and Friendship Public Charter School. After over a year of collaborative work among agencies and experts—and thanks to a generous grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)—the DC HSFN Report was published in January 2024. This report provides policymakers and the public with an overview of the policies, regulations, and standards that govern the District’s pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (PK-12) public education buildings and grounds. It also includes recommendations for how leaders in DC can collaborate across agencies to ensure facilities for all public schools in DC are safe, healthy, educationally appropriate, and equitable. The State Board is grateful for the strong interagency collaboration on this work—and looks to it as a model for how work in the District’s education space can and should be done.

### **Expanding our Reach and Visibility**

Last year, the State Board took intentional steps to ensure the public’s opinions and feedback on public education matters were heard. We participated in twenty (20) community engagement events and hosted several virtual and in-person sessions on the social studies standards and DC School Report Card format and structure. On September 10, the State Board partnered with the Washington Nationals to set up a booth in the main concourse at Nationals Park, where the Washington Nationals hosted the Los Angeles Dodgers. This was a unique opportunity for members to connect with thousands of attendees, including constituents who became more familiar with the work of the State Board. Members engaged with attendees, listened to their ideas and concerns related to public education, and provided an overview of the State Board’s work.

In addition to the State Board’s longstanding efforts to increase data collection and awareness of the importance of teacher retention in the District, we went the extra mile last year to find a special and concrete way to celebrate our educators. Last summer, the State Board partnered with the Ariel Atkins Foundation, led by Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) Washington Mystics guard and two-time all-star Ariel Atkins, in collaboration with the Lids Foundation, to surprise teachers at Drew Elementary School in Ward 7. The State Board and both foundations worked with Na’imah Salahuddin, the school’s principal, and Assistant Principal Brimaly Snipes to identify and purchase over \$25,000 in classroom items teachers wanted and needed. The teachers were then surprised with a celebratory assembly, shopping experience, and lunch. The State Board was proud to lead the planning and organization of this effort and looks forward to future collaboration with Ms. Atkins, the Ariel Atkins Foundation, the Lids Foundation, and any organizations that would like to partner on similar events to celebrate the District’s teachers.

### **Student Voice and Engagement**





As the only government agency that requires student input and comment on policy matters, the State Board is proud to have one of the District government’s most dynamic student engagement processes. Since 2015, the State Board’s Student Advisory Committee (SAC) has served to directly connect our elected members with the voices of District students. Chaired by the State Board’s four Student Representatives, the SAC is composed of 33 students attending District high schools. As a group, the SAC reviews provide input on State Board resolutions and projects and bring important issues related to the student experience before the State Board for their consideration and action. The State Board has worked with our education cluster partners to ensure that our SAC members are engaged in reviewing education standards, all State Board resolutions, district-wide safety recommendations, and local and national education panels.

Last year, two of our Student Representatives presented at the Aurora Institute Symposium in Palm Springs, California. Student Representative Téa Washington also led a well-attended session at the NASBE Annual Conference in San Diego entitled “Elevating Emotional Wellness in Adolescents.” The purpose of the session was to help attendees learn about the value of caring for mental health during the school day and provide strategies schools can use to promote emotional regulation and mental wellness.

### **We Can Do More**

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, for supporting our request to the Department of General Services (DGS) to upgrade the Old Council Chambers. Last summer, our executive director and staff met with DGS, the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), and the District Knowledge Network (DKN) to discuss the conditions of the Chamber and develop an action plan to make significant technological infrastructure upgrades. These upgrades will ensure that every District resident who wants to engage with the State Board has equal opportunity and access. We are excited to host our first hybrid State Board meeting next month.

The State Board is served by a small but dedicated team committed to providing support and expertise to the agency’s work. We have restructured our agency’s leadership team; with the help of the DC Department of Human Resources (DCHR), we have completed an audit of our position descriptions and added a Strategic Communications Fellow to support our communications team. We are excited to onboard our new procurement analyst in March to provide substantive operational, procurement, and financial resource management to the agency. To keep pace with the agency’s growth and required governmental responsibilities, such as having a dedicated Sexual Harassment Officer, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, and Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Coordinator, we need an additional full-time equivalent (FTE) to hire a human resources (HR) specialist. We currently have no internal HR capacity.

Lastly, I want 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. Toni Criner, Mr. Dan Davis, and their staff for tireless work for District residents. The State Board proudly provides administrative and operational support to these independent and impartial resources. We urge the





Council to ensure these offices have the necessary resources to continue and expand this vital work. We want to thank Chairman Mendelson for his vigilance and support in providing appropriate office space to both offices.

The State Board appreciates the support for our independence and authority that the Council has demonstrated for many years. We are confident that, together, we can work to expand opportunities and better the educational experience of all District students and educators. I welcome any questions you may have.

