



Testimony of Eboni-Rose Thompson  
Ward 7 Representative and President  
FY2022 Performance Oversight Hearing  
D.C. Council Committee of the Whole  
March 3, 2023

Good morning, 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. 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 elected members and four appointed student representatives who focus efforts through a committee structure that enables the State Board to internally identify and recommend policy and regulatory changes to continuously seek to 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. Over the last year, the State Board has been an education leader by amplifying community voice, enhancing interagency collaboration, and centering student engagement in our work.

**Amplifying Community Voice**

The State Board of Education held eleven (11) public meetings, twelve (12) working sessions, and over sixty (60) committee meetings last year. We received over 125 pieces of testimony on various topics, including the School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework, school-based mental health, education governance, attendance, public safety, out-of-school time programming, and more. We also received over 1,100 phone calls into our main line from constituents seeking information about accessing school records, alleging school-based complaints, asking about school enrollment policies, and more. We take feedback from the community to guide our actions seriously. For example, in SY2021–22, allegations of sexual assault in District schools were raised to State Board members. The State Board took the lead in responding to community members’ concerns, including providing information on safety interventions for students and families involved in the assault, hosting a roundtable to discuss how schools and policymakers can become more accountable for combatting sexual assault in schools, and drafting two resolutions, *SR22-6, Recommendations Related to Allegations of Sexual Assault and Abuse in Schools* and *SR22-16, On Sexual Assault Data*.

In response to the violence affecting youth and residents’ safety across the city, the State Board held a panel on public safety to discuss ongoing instances of violence occurring in D.C., specifically discussing the effects of violence on youth. The panelists illuminated the varying levels of work happening in the District at the government, school, community, and student levels, the need for safe and consistent funding streams to support public safety work, and the necessity





of maintaining active engagement with schools and communities. This was one of the most informative, notable, and engaging panels I have participated in during my tenure on the State Board—and I encourage members of the D.C. Council to review the recording on the State Board’s YouTube page.

The State Board then adopted *SR22-13, On Recommendations Related to Public Safety*, which recommended that the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) and other relevant agencies adopt solutions, including expanding the Safe Passage program, implementing communication and coordination plans between all Safe Passage workers, school leaders, and other institutions responsible for the safety of students, standardizing training across safe passage providers and considering the adoption of Safety Advocates to fill the security and communications gaps formerly filled by school resource officers. The State Board looks forward to following up on this work in the coming year—and thanks all agencies and partners who have been involved to date.

### **Interagency Collaboration**

Throughout the year, the State Board has prioritized interagency collaboration with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and other education-related agencies on major issues—most notably the updates and revisions to the statewide accountability plan, attendance regulations, and community service graduation requirements, as well as continuing the ongoing work to revise the social studies standards and focusing on early literacy. Last year, OSSE met with the State Board last year regarding the 100-hour community service graduation requirement. They sought to understand whether regulatory action would be required to eliminate, reduce, or retain the requirement. For context, the D.C. Council waived the 100-hour community service requirement for graduating seniors during the 2019–20, 2020–21, and 2021–22 school years due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. With significant input and nuanced suggestions from our Student Representatives and members of the Student Advisory Committee (SAC), the revisions established a fairer and more equitable hours requirement for students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, provided reasonable flexibilities for transfer students, required community service hours to transfer between District LEAs when a student transfers schools and improved the definition of what constitutes community service for purposes of graduation.

The State Board’s commitment to interagency collaboration can also be seen in our Healthy School Facilities Network (HSFN) team. Last year the State Board was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) to help the State Board formed a collaborative team of experts to take targeted, concrete actions toward creating healthy, safe, and educationally appropriate school facilities. This team comprises representatives from the State Board, DME, DC Public Schools (DCPS), D.C. Council, George Washington University, the 21st Century School Fund, Mary’s Center, and one of the District’s largest charter LEAs. Together, the team has been exploring state-level public school facility standards for school location, design, condition, utilization, and options for appropriate roles and responsibilities for the State Board with education facilities. The HSFN team will prepare a policy paper on its findings and recommendations by June 2023. The team’s work coincides nicely with the Master Facilities Plan





(MFP) and Student Assignment & School Boundary Study slated to begin this spring through the DME’s Office. 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 should be done.

In March 2022, the D.C. Council held a hearing on Bill 24-428, The School Attendance Amendment Act of 2021. The bill would have changed the definition of required daily attendance to a 60/40 ratio or as being present for 60 percent of the full instructional day. The State Board testified in favor of this change but objected to including this ratio in the statute. The State Board asked Council that changes to the appropriate DC Municipal Regulations (5-A DCMR § 2199) follow the regular approval process, including a vote by the State Board. Since 2015, the State Board has supported a change to the “80/20 rule,” recognizing that the rule was punitive in nature and disincentivized tardy students from coming to school. Further, the State Board questioned the bill’s usage of “physically in attendance,” such that learning may occur in different postures due to the pandemic. By May 2022, OSSE presented draft language to codify attendance collection procedures for SY2022–23, which included a shift to “60/40” and language on how attendance would be taken in virtual learning environments.

To further seek feedback on these proposed regulations, the State Board called for public comment and held a panel on the state of student attendance at its May public meeting. Panelists overwhelmingly supported changing the definition of “present” and discussed how the 80/20 rule does not help schools identify the root causes of chronic absenteeism and tardiness. In June, the State Board also met with Councilmember Trayon White and his staff to discuss addressing the punitive nature of the 80/20 rule. By the July public meeting, the proposed attendance regulations were unanimously approved in *SR22-3, To Approve the District of Columbia’s Amendments to the Compulsory Education and School Attendance Regulations*.

One of the State Board’s statutory responsibilities is to approve DC’s statewide accountability system as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). After an extensive engagement process, the State Board adopted *SR22-4, to Approve the District of Columbia’s State Accountability Plan*” and accompanying resolution *SR22-5, to Establish a Two-Year Schedule for the Amendment Process to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. The amended plan eliminates the STAR, single summative school rating, increases the weight given to student growth, and adjusts to represent student groups more equitably. We eagerly await approval by the U.S. Department of Education, and the opportunity to continue working with OSSE to move toward implementation, including the redesign of DC’s School Report Card.

Additionally, the State Board continues working with OSSE to improve early literacy in our city. In November, the board passed resolution *SR22-12 On Early Literacy Priorities* appointing Representative Chang (Ward 2) to the Early Literacy Taskforce and outlining board priorities for the task force.

The final area I want to spotlight under interagency collaboration is OSSE’s work to revise the District’s decades-old social studies standards and bring the health standards into compliance with





legislation passed by the D.C. Council on menstrual education. The State Board is committed to ensuring our social studies standards recognize that the world our students are growing up in is—more than ever—globally interconnected and culturally diverse. District students need the knowledge, skills, experiences, and mindsets to prepare them for informed and engaged citizenship and careers in this globalized world. Moreover, the State Board is working with OSSE to finalize and approve the addendum to D.C.’s health education standards to comply with the “Expanding Student Access to Period Products Act of 2022.” The SBOE team worked with OSSE to ensure an open public comment opportunity for constituents and shared a feedback letter. We also shared all of the public testimony we received about the standards. We look forward to continuing to work with the OSSE team to bring both sets of standards across the finish line and identify strong policies and procedures for ensuring that other existing and future sets of standards do not go years without review or updates.

### **Student Voice and Engagement**

The State Board boasts one of the District government’s most dynamic student engagement processes, and we are the only government agency that requires student input and comment on policy matters. 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 comprised of students attending a District high school. As a group, the SAC works to review and 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.

On April 6, 2022, members of the SAC led a presentation at the State Board’s working session titled the “*D.C. SAC Youth Vaccination Initiatives Project*.” The SAC proposed an initiative for the next school year to strengthen youth vaccination numbers, consisting of small, school-based initiatives, in-person and virtual townhalls, and vaccination sites. They called on State Board members to help facilitate constituent outreach and advocate for this initiative to be continued in fall 2022. The SAC was able to start phase one of their initiative during the summer. SAC members engaged with youth virtually through different social media outlets to educate and inform them about the importance of vaccinations.

Last year, our student representatives presented at the virtual Aurora Institute Symposium and the NASBE Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. Their presentations explored the importance of having authentic student representation on state boards and in policy overall, as well as findings from the city-wide survey they conducted during the 2021–22 school year, which had three sections: mental health, safe passage, and COVID-19 safety in schools. Further, a student representative was also a part of the keynote panel at the 2022 NASBE Legislative Conference—discussing education post-COVID and policy implications.

### **We Can Do More**





To provide equitable access to our public meetings, we need facilities and infrastructure to meet the technological demands of a hybrid meeting. The State Board tried twice to offer hybrid testimony opportunities last year, but we were unsuccessful. The Old Council Chambers need significant technological infrastructure upgrades to ensure that every District resident who wants to engage has equal opportunity and access.

Moreover, the State Board is served by a small but dedicated team who work very hard to provide support and expertise to the agency's work. Over the last year, administrative responsibilities have stretched our team beyond its limits. Our agency only has one staff person responsible for its procurement, budget, and operation functions for the State Board's central office, the Office of Student Advocate, and the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education. This is a dangerous precedent, creating conditions for burnout and mistakes. To keep pace with the agency's growth and required governmental responsibilities, we will need additional full-time employees (FTEs) for administrative support.

Last year the agency was without a permanent executive director for nearly seven months. We are excited to welcome Executive Director Bernice Butler to our team. She began her career with the D.C. government 15 years ago as a Capital City Fellow before entering the nonprofit sector. We are excited to welcome her back to D.C. Government and look forward to the expertise, strategy, and energy she will bring to the leadership of the State Board.

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. Serena Hayes, Mr. Dan Davis, and their staff for their tireless work for District residents. The State Board proudly provides administrative and operational 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. We would like 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. I welcome any questions you may have.

