



## **2015 Year in Review**

Jack Jacobson, President, Ward 2  
Karen Williams, Vice President, Ward 7  
Mary Lord, At Large  
Laura Wilson Phelan, Ward 1  
Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3  
Kamili Anderson, Ward 4  
Mark Jones, Ward 5  
Joe Weedon, Ward 6  
Tierra Jolly, Ward 8

January 20, 2016



## **Executive Summary**

2015 was an eventful year for the DC State Board of Education, and for education in the District of Columbia. While we have accomplished many things over the past 12 months, there is still much to be done to ensure that every student graduates well prepared for the future. The DC State Board of Education (SBOE) is ready to tackle these challenges in the year ahead.

In January, the SBOE welcomed four new members: Laura Wilson Phelan, representing Ward 1; Ruth Wattenberg, representing Ward 3; Joe Weedon, representing Ward 6; and Destinee Whittington, from Richard Wright Public Charter School, representing students. Each of the nine members of the SBOE have participated in numerous working sessions, community meetings, Advisory Neighborhood Commission briefings, and Ward education council and alliances, and worked collaboratively with Mayor Muriel Bowser's administration and the Council of the District of Columbia.

Further, members of the SBOE served on various national, regional, and citywide boards and committees, including as the 2015 President of the National Association of State Boards of Education and as members of the District's inter-agency Truancy Task Force, the Washington Area Boards of Education, and the recently constituted Deputy Mayor of Education's Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force, bringing the voice of District residents to the education policy debate from at the federal and local level.

The SBOE worked on a number of significant issues over the course of the year. Among those highlighted in this report:

- Developed recommendations that strengthened the District's successful waiver application for flexibility from elements of No Child Left Behind
- Issued a Truancy Committee report on the challenges of implementing the District's current truancy policy, with recommendations for improvement
- Approved a State Diploma for individuals who pass the GED or complete the National External Diploma Program
- Created a High School Credit Flexibility Task Force that investigated opportunities and developed recommendations for allowing high school students to earn credit outside of the time-based Carnegie unit
- Initiated a review of the District's health education standards and proposed revisions
- Launched a Student Advisory Committee, chaired by the SBOE's two student representatives, for District students to provide policy recommendations to the SBOE

2015 also marked the first year of the Partnership for Assessment of College and Career Readiness (PARCC), the District's Common Core-aligned annual assessments. The results of these rigorous new exams provide a sobering picture of how our students are performing, including the alarming disparities in performance that persist among our students. The National Assessment for Educational Progress, also known as "the nation's report card" confirmed these troubling trends. Closing this opportunity gap is a top priority for the SBOE, which formed a committee this year that has begun working to find ways to combat this problem.

All eleven members of the DC State Board of Education are committed to collectively doing their part to ensure that every student in the District of Columbia receives a top-quality public education.



## **DC State Board of Education 2015 Year in Review**

### Introduction

The DC State Board of Education (SBOE) took on a variety of projects in 2015. The SBOE members sat on committees, met with constituents across the District, and tirelessly worked with other policymakers to improve education for the students of this community. The SBOE was able to collaborate with the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) at its monthly working sessions to craft policy that reflects the concerns of parents and students. At the SBOE public meetings, Board members heard from community members and voted on resolutions approving policy initiatives. Several landmark achievements are highlighted in this report.

### **Notable Policy Achievements**

#### ESEA Flexibility Waiver

The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has been the primary federal education law since 2001. Beginning in 2011, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan invited chief state school officers to apply for a waiver that would grant schools flexibility in meeting some of the provisions of NCLB.

The District submitted a flexibility waiver application that was approved by the U.S. Department of Education in the summer of 2012 and it remained in effect through the 2013-14 school year. It was also adopted by the SBOE as the District of Columbia's Statewide Accountability Plan in July 2012. Following the passage of the flexibility waiver, DC public schools saw an increase in overall student proficiency levels and an overall decrease in the size of academic achievement gaps, prompting the State Superintendent of Education to submit an application requesting an extension of the flexibility waiver for DC schools through the end of the 2014-15 school year. The extension was approved by the SBOE and U.S. Department of Education in September of 2014.

On November 13, 2014, Secretary Duncan issued an invitation to chief state school officers to apply for a three-year renewal of the flexibility waiver that would remain in effect until the end of the 2017-18 school year. DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) made several presentations to the SBOE on renewal of the Statewide Accountability Plan and the various amendments they wished to make to that plan, including:

- Strengthening implementation of the ESEA flexibility waiver
- A one year pause in school classifications
- A one year pause in the use of assessment results for educator evaluations (reporting still mandatory)
- Revision of reward school criteria
- Revision and clarification of priority and focus school exit criteria
- Improved supports for priority and focus schools
- Description of support for economically disadvantaged students



- Aligning DC’s flexibility waiver with the use of next generation assessments
- Clarification of accountability terminology

The SBOE reviewed these amendments and drafted a [report](#) for OSSE on their waiver request and issued a series of recommendations. These recommendations centered on the need for more readily available data on student academic achievement, learning conditions, and use of resources. While members of the SBOE did approve of the flexibility waiver as it existed on March 18, 2015, this approval was conditional upon the inclusion of a set of future amendments based on the recommendations included in the SBOE’s report to OSSE. On June 17, 2015, the SBOE [approved](#) the Renewal and Amendment of the Statewide Accountability Plan.

### Truancy Report

On April 1, 2015, the SBOE formally adopted a [report](#) drafted by Kamili Anderson, Ward 4 member and Chair of the Truancy and Student Engagement Committee. This report sheds light on the challenges that have accompanied implementation of the District of Columbia’s new compulsory attendance laws, particularly the “80/20 rule.” Since the adoption of this report, the Board has been an active participant on the Deputy Mayor for Education’s (DME) Truancy Task Force, which is investigating solutions to many of the issues the SBOE identified.

In 2013, the District redefined the meaning of “present” in school attendance, now known as the “80/20” rule. According to this rule, students will only be marked present if they are physically in attendance at school or at a school-approved event for at least 80 percent of the instructional day.

Since then, the SBOE has made numerous inquiries into the efficacy of the 80/20 rule. Principals, administrators, and attendance staff voiced negative opinions of the 80/20 rule. Many of them argued that their truancy rates had drastically increased after implementing the new rule. A number of school officials who were interviewed said that inconsistent schedule structures across DC exacerbate the problem. Some schools do not let tardy students enter first period, which pushes them over the threshold for being absent that day. Others use block scheduling, so missing one class makes a student absent for the entire day as well. School officials also noted that their attendance staff was not equipped to handle the mounds of paperwork that accompany implementation of the 80/20 rule.

The SBOE’s research into compulsory attendance laws that exist in other cities around the country found that the District’s 80/20 proportion is the strictest of all jurisdictions.

Based on the SBOE’s findings, members of the Truancy and Student Engagement Committee developed several recommendations for the SBOE to take in order to address the issues and concerns raised in regard to the “80/20 rule.” These recommendations include:

- 1) Calling for OSSE to investigate the challenges and inconsistent findings reported by school-based administrators, along with practices employed at the school-level, in the recordation of student absences and tardiness based on the 80/20 rule.



- 2) Calling for OSSE to evaluate the impact of the District of Columbia's attendance regulations, including the 80/20 rule, on students, their families, the criminal justice and human service (e.g., CFSA) systems, and school climate. The report shall be delivered to the State Board no later than December 31, 2016, and shall include a cost-benefit analysis related to full compliance with compulsory attendance regulations.
- 3) Advising the Council of the District of Columbia to appropriate funds for the development and implementation of solutions that will ensure uniform implementation of the District's school attendance laws, support school-based administrative staff in the accurate reporting of student attendance, and strengthen truancy prevention work in schools.
- 4) Calling for OSSE to conduct research on truancy-prevention practices and strategies in the District of Columbia as well as in other districts and states, including an investigation into the background and rationale for implementing the 80/20 rule
- 5) Advising the DME, in consultation with District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (PCSB), to investigate the limitations of compulsory attendance regulations on student learning that extends beyond the classroom, with particular focus on potential changes in practice which could include expansion of the definition of "excused" absences to include guided learning opportunities that extend beyond the classroom.
- 6) Advising the Council and the Mayor to consider expansion of the District's Department of Transportation's (DDOT) student transit subsidy program to include free Metrorail passes for students to travel to and from school and possibly to provide free transportation for parents/guardians of young students to accompany their children to and from school on the bus and Metrorail.

In December, Councilmember Grosso and Chairman Mendelson introduced a bill to address some of the concerns included in the SBOE report. The School Attendance Clarification Amendment Act of 2015, if passed, will prohibit schools from suspending or expelling students based on unexcused absences or tardiness, redefines the referral process for students who are chronically absent or tardy. Students will only be referred to Child and Family Services, or the court system, if they receive 10 or 15 unexcused full-day absences. Additionally, Mayor Bowser expanded the Kids Ride Free program to provide Metrorail subsidies to the parents and guardians of young students taking public transportation to school.

### State Diploma

The SBOE conducted substantial research and outreach into granting a State Diploma for individuals who pass the General Educational Development (GED) exam, or complete the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). The Board passed a resolution in November advising the Office of the State Superintendent to create regulations for such a credential. Currently, those who pass the GED receive a "District of Columbia High School Equivalency Credential."

In July, the Board heard from many members of the adult education community about the need for such a policy in the District. Adult learners overwhelmingly believed that a diploma would remove barriers and open doors that have previously been shut to them. They believe that a



stigma persists around the GED that makes it hard to get jobs, and causes difficulty pursuing postsecondary education. Over 60 thousand District residents do not have a high school diploma or its equivalency, and an increasing number of DC jobs require postsecondary education.

Adult education providers attested to these students' hard work and persistence to pass the newly revised GED exam. The new testis aligned to the Common Core State Standards and takes most people two years of preparation to pass.

The Board revisited the topic in October, where they heard testimony from employers about their experiences with GED recipients. They also spoke with the principal of Ballou STAY about their NEDP program at the October working session meeting.

The Closing the Achievement Gap committee decided to investigate this issue and answer many questions that Board members had around these second chance credentials. Ultimately, the SBOE passed a [resolution](#) advising OSSE to promulgate regulations around the State Diploma. The resolution acknowledges the need for alternative pathways to a diploma for adult dropouts and the rigor of these routes. The resolution urges OSSE to take steps to minimize the chance that students will dropout of traditional high school to pursue this option, notably by maintaining that GED be restricted to those 18 or older, and the NEDP to those 25 or older.

The resolution also calls for accountability in a variety of ways. It clarifies that State Diploma recipients not be counted in the District's graduation rates. This will maintain transparency on our school system and help ensure that as many students as possible complete DC's comprehensive graduation requirements. Additionally, the resolution calls for OSSE to report the impact of the policy every five years with data such as GED completion rates for those in publicly funded adult education programs. The SBOE plans to vote on these regulations in January 2016.

### Health Education Standards

In 2015, the SBOE took the lead on facilitating a review of the District's health education standards. The current standards were adopted by the SBOE shortly after their development by the U.S. Department of Education in 2007, and these standards closely mirror the national health education standards. Best practices suggest reviewing standards every seven years, so last year the Board put together a working group to review and update these standards.

The health standards working group of consisted of experts and stakeholders, including staff from DCPS and OSSE, educators, physicians, community based organizations, principals, higher education faculty, researchers, parents, and youth. This group found that the current standards do not meet the needs of an urban school district, and proposed a set of standards that are more skills-based than the current iteration. This focus on skills is in line with the shift to the Common Core State Standards.





Data from the 2012 DC Youth Risk Behavior survey demonstrates a need for health standards that address the needs of our students in areas such as nutrition, mental and emotional health, violence and safety, and sexual health.

- **Nutrition:** Data shows that 32 percent of DC youth are obese or overweight, and only 25 percent of high school students eat breakfast daily. Seventeen percent of high school students reported going hungry at least once in the prior month.
- **Mental and emotional health:** More than one-fourth of middle school females have seriously considered suicide. Thirty percent of middle school students report being bullied on school property in the previous month, with rates much higher for LGBTQ students.
- **Violence and safety:** Twenty percent of high school students reported carrying a weapon in the last 30 days, and 40 percent were involved in a physical fight in the previous calendar year.
- **Sexual health:** Almost 20 percent of middle school students reported being sexually active, and teen pregnancy rates remain high for the District.

At the July SBOE public meeting, the SBOE heard from students, teachers, and other community members about the need for a new set of health education standards. Since then, the SBOE has engaged with OSSE for their input on the health standards. OSSE and the SBOE are currently working together to develop a transparent process for additional review, adoption, and implementation of a new set of standards, ensuring that educators and the community will continue to provide input on this important issue.

OSSE plans to field test an assessment based on a draft of these new standards in the spring of 2016. This will allow educators to provide additional feedback with a plan to fully implement the standards in the 2016-17 school year.

### High School Credit Flexibility Task Force

In August, the SBOE launched the High School Credit Flexibility Task Force with the intention of investigating opportunities for high school students to earn credit outside of the Carnegie unit. The Carnegie unit is an administrative mechanism that equates to 120 seat hours, and is the length of a typical year-long course. Current graduation requirements consist of 24 Carnegie units in a wide array of subjects.

Laura Wilson Phelan, SBOE Ward 1 member, led the task force. The participants consisted of Board members, leaders, and educators from across the DC education community. Representatives on the task force came from many organizations and agencies, including the Council of the District of Columbia, OSSE, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, Washington Teachers' Union, and others.

The group met seven times throughout the fall as they worked to create a set of recommendations for regulations that OSSE could propose to the State Board. The discussions from these meetings



centered on developing systems where students benefit from flexibility from strict seat time requirements.

The group considered a number of proposals that included waivers from current seat time requirements and a variety of other means for receiving credit. The task force voted on a final set of recommendations at its final meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. These recommendations were drafted into a report to be presented to the State Board.

The final recommendations from the task force on credit flexibility were to:

- 1) Create a waiver process for schools that wish to implement competency-based learning
- 2) Allow students to receive credit for demonstrated prior knowledge via an OSSE-approved test in foreign language and mathematics
- 3) Remove the requirement that forces students to enroll in Algebra I in the 9th grade

The SBOE adopted the recommendations at its December 2015 Public Meeting. A resolution was also adopted at that meeting that advised OSSE to promulgate regulations that would institute the recommendations.

### Student Advisory Committee

This year, the State Board launched the Student Advisory Committee (SAC). High school students from both DCPS and charter schools all across the city applied to be on this committee. The State Board's Student Representatives Brian Contreras and Destinee Whittington lead the SAC.

The committee met for the first time this October and discussed numerous issues in public education that they would like to work on resolving. Issues suggested by student members ranged from gender-biased dress codes, inconsistent discipline policies, and inconsistent

After much deliberation the SAC decided to tackle teacher accountability and certification as their topic for the duration of the school year. The group plans to meet quarterly and present a set of recommendations at the end of the school year.

### Closing the Achievement Gap

The DC State Board of Education launched the Closing the Achievement Gap task force in February as a way to examine, and hopefully rectify, the disparities in student achievement across the District. Ward 8 member Tierra Jolly chaired the task force on this endeavor.

While the District is only 68 square miles, there are two very different cities. According to an *Education Week* analysis, only half of school-aged children in DC are in households earning over 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Similarly, only 47 percent of school-aged children in





DC have a parent with a postsecondary degree. A mere 60 percent of children have a parent working full-time during the entire year, ranking DC last among the 50 states.<sup>1</sup>

This divide between the haves and the have-nots is also largely a geographic divide. Many of these low-income families live east of the Anacostia River in Wards 7 and 8. One in four children east of the river lives in extreme poverty (i.e. less than \$10,000 for a family of three). The extreme poverty rate for children in the rest of the city is just five percent. Incomes have decreased by ten percent since 2007 east of the river, while incomes rose 16 percent across the city as a whole (adjusting for inflation).<sup>2</sup> The average family income in 2011 for Wards 7 and 8 were \$57 thousand and \$43 thousand, respectively, while the lowest ward income west of the river was Ward 5 at \$79 thousand. The remaining five wards have annual family incomes ranging from roughly \$100 thousand to \$240 thousand.<sup>3</sup>

2015 provided numerous opportunities for the District to reexamine the large disparities in student achievement that takes place across wards, across race, and across income levels. This year marked the first year of results for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams for DC students, which replaced the DC CAS as the state's accountability tests. These rigorous new exams, aligned to the Common Core State Standards, found that few students are on track to be ready for college or a career.

Additionally, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provided an opportunity for the District to compare itself to the 50 states. This assessment, often referred to as the Nation's Report Card, takes place every two years and is the only standardized assessment across the entire nation. The results show rapid improvement for the District overall over the last decade, but large disparities remain among our students.

An evaluation of the District's education sector this summer by the National Research Council of the National Academies highlighted this as well. The report, "An Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape," known colloquially as the "PERRA report," analyzed the District's progress since it passed legislation in 2007 that created the State Board of Education and established mayoral control of the public schools.

These test results, along with the information published by the National Research Council, provide a clear picture of where the District stands, and the work that needs to be done to ensure that all DC students graduate ready for college or a career.

## **PERRA Report**

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<sup>1</sup> "District of Columbia State Highlights 2015" Education Week Research Center.

<http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/2015/shr/16shr.dc.h34.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Lazere, Ed "Ensuring that Everyone Benefits from the Economic Development East of the Anacostia River" *DC Fiscal Policy Institute*. November 10, 2015. <https://www.cityfirstfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/11.5.2015-CityFirst-Summit.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Research Council. (2015). *An Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape*. 29.



The National Research Council released a highly publicized report on the Public Education Reform Act of 2007 (PERRA), and its impact in the subsequent years. This legislation eliminated the Board of Education and established the DC State Board of Education. This landmark law in the District also gave the mayor control over the public schools, established the Deputy Mayor for Education, created the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE), and the Public Charter School Board (PCSB), among other things.

While focusing on the bureaucracies and models of the education sector, the PERRA report also provided a portrait of the changing education landscape over the last several years. This included an overview of the shifting demographics of the District, and test score trends in the final years of the DC CAS.

### Demographics of DC Schools

Between the 2006-07 school year and the 2013-14 school year, the number of students in District public schools (both DCPS and charters) rose from 72,000 to 83,000. The makeup of this body changed, however. The number of students in charters, for instance, rose from 27 percent of the public school population to 44 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The city has changed racially in recent years as well. While the city was 60 percent Black at the time of the 2000 Census, now less than half of the city identifies as Black. In the public schools, however, 71 percent of DCPS students and 79 percent of charter students are Black. This is a slight decrease from the schools being 82 percent African American in 2007. The public schools are now 20 percent White (up from 16 percent in 2007), with DCPS seeing 23 percent White students. The rate of Hispanic students in District public schools is now 16 percent, up from 12 percent in 2007. There's an equal percentage of Hispanics in both DCPS and the charters.<sup>5</sup>

While the number of special education students in DC has stayed constant since 2007 (13 percent) the number of English-language learners saw a slight uptick from 7 percent to 9 percent over those years. Ten percent of DCPS students are English learners while seven percent of charter students are ELLs.<sup>6</sup>

One major demographic change in recent years is the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eligibility status is often used as a crude measure of poverty in schools and in accountability reporting. The percentage of students eligible for this service jumped from 45 percent in 2007 to 55 percent in 2014. The numbers are comparable between DCPS and the charters, with 56 percent and 54 percent respectively. However, the data across these years is not entirely comparable. During the 2012-13 school year, the District changed its eligibility requirements. Now if a school has students that are 40 percent or more students "at-risk," then all students are automatically eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, regardless of family income.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Page 24.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Page 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Page 24.



## Teacher Quality

The neediest students also need the best instructors. However, a large body of research suggests that the highest poverty schools tend to be staffed with the least experienced teachers.<sup>8</sup> The District's IMPACT scores, its teacher accountability model, support this finding. Over four years, from 2010-2013, teachers averaged a score of 305.9 on IMPACT. The average scores in wards 7 and 8 were considerably lower at 292 and 289, respectively. Scores for teachers in wards 2 and 3 averaged much higher at 317 and 332.<sup>9</sup> While teacher accountability scores have been suspended as the District moves to new Common Core-aligned assessments, this disparity must be noted as the city works to close the achievement gap in 2016 and beyond.

## Graduation Rates

Over the past several years, DC has made gains in its graduation rates but gaps still persist. Beginning in 2011, all states began calculating their on-time graduation rate using the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). Between 2011 and 2013, DC's graduation rate ticked up from 59 percent to 62 percent, but it still the lowest among states reporting data and well below the national average of 81 percent. The gaps are even more pronounced among student groups. Sixty-one percent of African American students in DC graduated on-time in 2013, and 62 percent of Hispanic students did the same. On the other hand, 85 percent of white students and 86 percent of Asian students graduated on time. Results were even worse among students with disabilities (41 percent), the economically disadvantaged (59 percent), and limited-English proficient students (52 percent).<sup>10</sup>

## **Transition from DC CAS**

The DC CAS was the District's accountability assessment from 2006 to 2014. Its reading portion was administered to all students in grades 2-10, and the math portion was given to students in grades 2-8 and during students' sophomore year of high school. Students in grades 5 and 8 took a science exam, along with high school biology students. A composition exam was given in grades 4, 7, and 10.<sup>11</sup>

While DC has transitioned from the DC CAS to the PARCC exam, the most recent DC CAS data is still useful to analyze disparities across the city, and serve as a baseline for what achievement gaps have persisted in the city over the past several years.

While there were some modest gains over the last five years of the DC CAS, the reality shows stark gaps in achievement between various subgroups on both the reading and math exams. In fact, results became worse for English language learners between 2009 and 2014.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Page 110.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Page 110.

<sup>10</sup> "District of Columbia State Highlights 2015" Education Week Research Center.  
<http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2015/sgb/33sgb.dc.h34.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> National Research Council. (2015). *An Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape*. 162.



<b>DC CAS Reading</b> <sup>12</sup>	2009 Proficient or Advanced	2014 Proficient or Advanced	Change
White	91	93	2
African American	43	45	2
Hispanic	50	50	0
Asian	76	78	2
English Language Learners	45	37	-8
Special Education	16	21	5
Economically Disadvantaged	40	42	2

<b>DC CAS Math</b> <sup>13</sup>	2009 Proficient or Advanced	2014 Proficient or Advanced	Change
White	88	93	5
African American	42	48	6
Hispanic	53	58	5
Asian	83	87	4
English Language Learners	51	49	-2
Special Education	14	26	12
Economically Disadvantaged	41	48	7

Examining school-level data shows that these achievement gaps persist geographically as well, and begin in the early grades. For instance, the highest achieving elementary school on the DC CAS for mathematics was Horace Mann Elementary in Ward 3, which saw a 93.7 percent proficient rate in 2014. C.W. Harris Elementary, in Ward 7, saw only 11.5 percent of its children score proficient on the exam. A Ward 3 school, Janney Elementary, also saw the highest proficiency rate for Hispanic students out of any elementary school in the District (88.9 percent).<sup>14</sup>

Similarly on the elementary school reading exams, Janney Elementary had the highest overall proficiency rate at 91.1 percent, and the highest proficiency rate for Hispanic students (85.2 percent). On the other hand, Bancroft Elementary in Ward 1 saw only 25 percent of its Hispanic students score proficient on reading. Reading scores in Ward 3 ranged from 91.1 percent to 67.6

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Page 172

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Page 173.

<sup>14</sup> Data compiled from Learn DC at <http://www.learnDC.org>.



percent, while scores in Ward 7 ranged as widely as 89.5 percent to 11.5 percent at its elementary schools.<sup>15</sup>

These gaps persist in the middle school grades as well. Middle school math scores ranged from 88.1 percent proficient to 79.6 percent proficient in Ward 3, while schools in Ward 6 ranged from 71.8 percent all the way to 8.8 percent proficient. In reading, Ward 3 scores range only between 83.9 percent and 79.8 percent, while scores range from only 67.6 percent to as low as 8.8 percent in Ward 6.<sup>16</sup>

### **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a national assessment that serves as the nation's report card on student achievement. The exam is given to students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia every other year to students in 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This report will focus on 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math and reading results for the years 2005, 2013, and 2015. This provides a snapshot of how students performed both the last time the test was administered, and how students performed a decade ago.

These NAEP scores show that there has been progress in the District since 2005, but large disparities remain between major subgroups, specifically race and income.

#### **Race and Reading:**

Overall, the District has seen progress in reading scores over the last ten years. From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of White, Black, and Hispanic 4th grade students who scored at or above proficient in reading increased by approximately ten percentage points. Over the same ten years, more mild gains were made in the percentage of White, Black and Hispanic 8th grade students who scored at or above proficient in reading with the percentage of White 8th grade students increasing by two percentage points, the percentage of Black 8th grade students increasing by three percentage points, and the percentage of Hispanic 8th grade students increasing by one percentage point.<sup>17</sup>

The two years between 2013 and 2015 saw mild to moderate gains in the percentage of White students in both 4th and 8th reading scores. Over the course of these two years, the percentage of White students in 4th and 8th grade who scored at or above proficient increased by four percentage points and three percentage points, respectively. While the percentage of Black students in 4th grade who scored at or above proficient in reading rose by 3 percentage points, the percentage of Black students in 8th grade who scored at or above proficient in reading did not change. However, the proficiency rate for Hispanic students dropped by a percent over that

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Data collected from National Center for Education Statistics NAEP Data Explorer at <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>



time. Despite the stagnation and decline in these groups scores, the reading scores are higher than 2005 across all three subgroups.<sup>18</sup>

<b>DC 4th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Reading by Race/Ethnicity</b>			
	White	Black	Hispanic
2005	70	8	12
2013	77	15	23
2015	81	18	22

<b>DC 8th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Reading by Race/Ethnicity</b>			
	White	Black	Hispanic
2005	74	9	18
2013	73	12	20
2015	76	12	19

Race and Math:

From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of White students in 4th grade who scored at or above proficient in math saw a moderate increase of 8 percentage points while the percentage of Black and Hispanic students in 4th grade who scored at or above proficient in math rose substantially by 15 and 19 percentage points, respectively. Similar gains were made over the course of the same ten years for White, Black, and Hispanic students in 8th grade. 8th grade proficiency rates for white students rose by 5 points, by nine points for Black students, and 10 points for Hispanic students.<sup>19</sup>

While the last decade saw students’ proficiency rates rise overall, the District saw declines from its results two years ago. From 2013 to 2015, the percentage of White students in 4th grade who scored at or above proficient in math decreased by three percentage points while the percentage of White, Black, and Hispanic students in 8th grade who scored at or above proficient fell by one percentage point. Black and Hispanic students in 4th grade were the only two groups of students who saw an increase in the percent of students proficient in math between 2013 and 2015. It is important to note that while the percentage of white students in 4th grade and white, black, and

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.





Hispanic students in 8th grade did decrease between 2013 and 2015, these groups proficiency rates are still higher than they were in 2005.<sup>20</sup>

DC 4th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Math by Race/Ethnicity			
	White	Black	Hispanic
2005	78	5	11
2013	88	19	23
2015	85	20	30

DC 8th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Math by Race/Ethnicity			
	White	Black	Hispanic
2005	69	4	9
2013	75	14	20
2015	74	13	19

### National School Lunch Program Eligibility and Reading

Over the course of the ten years between 2005 to 2015, the percentage of 4th and 8th grade students both eligible and not eligible for free and reduced lunch who scored at or above proficient in reading increased. This increase was mild for 4th and 8th grade students eligible for free and reduced lunch with the percentage rising by five and two percentage points, respectively. This increase was much more significant for 4th and 8th grade students not eligible for free and reduced lunch with the percentage proficient in reading rising by a 16 percentage points in fourth grade and 26 points for 8<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>21</sup>

The difference between the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch who scored at or above proficient and the percentage of students not eligible for free and reduced lunch who scored at or above proficient has widened drastically during the ten years between 2005 and 2013. The difference in percentage points between the two groups in 2005 was 23 for 4th graders and 12 for 8th graders. In 2015, the difference in percentage points between the two groups had risen to 51 points for 4th graders and 36 for 8th graders.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



<b>DC 4th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Reading by National School Lunch Program</b>		
	Eligible	Not Eligible
2005	6	29
2013	13	61
2015	14	66

<b>DC 8th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Reading by National School Lunch Program</b>		
	Eligible	Not Eligible
2005	8	20
2013	10	42
2015	10	46

#### National School Lunch Program Eligibility and Math

From 2005 to 2015, significant gains were made in math for non-eligible 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. While only 27 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students not eligible for free and reduced lunch achieved proficiency in math in 2005, 26 percent of fourth grade students not eligible for free and reduced lunch scored at or above proficient in math ten years later in 2015 - an increase of 42 percentage points. Even more dramatic was the change in the percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students not eligible for free and reduced lunch. Whereas only 16 percent of eighth graders not eligible for free and reduced lunch achieved proficiency in math in 2005, 46 percent of eighth graders not eligible for free and reduced lunch scored at or above proficient in math in 2015 – an increase of 30 percentage points.<sup>23</sup>

Fourth and eighth grade students who are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch also saw gains in the percentage of students who scored at or above proficient in math between 2005 and 2015, although those gains were much more modest than those experienced by fourth and eighth from wealthier families. The percentage of fourth grade students eligible for free and reduced lunch who scored at or above proficient in math rose from five percent in 2005 to 18 percent in 2015, an increase of 13 percentage points. For 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, the number rose from four percent to 11 percent over the last decade. However, the gap between those eligible and not eligible has increased as well. The gap between eligible and non-eligible students rose from 22

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



points to 51 points among 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, and from 12 points to 35 points among 8<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>24</sup>

<b>DC 4th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Math by National School Lunch Program</b>		
	Eligible	Not Eligible
2005	5	27
2013	17	68
2015	18	69

<b>DC 8th Grade Students at or Above Proficient in Math by National School Lunch Program</b>		
	Eligible	Not Eligible
2005	4	16
2013	12	46
2015	11	46

### **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)**

The 2014-15 school year marked the first year of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams. PARCC was designed by a consortium of states to provide a comprehensive test of students’ skills that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. These tests set a new baseline for student achievement as we redefine what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Students were tested in each grade from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. High school students taking geometry and English II were also tested.

Scores from PARCC are on a five-point scale. A score of five means a student exceeded expectations, and a four means that a student met expectations. A student scoring at level three is said to be “approaching expectations.” At the high school level, scores of four and five are deemed college-and-career ready.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



The results provide a sobering picture of student achievement in the District, and that much work needs to be done in the future.

### High School

Approximately 3,500 students took both the English II and Geometry assessments in the first year of PARCC. Previously, 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were tested on the DC CAS. However, the PARCC exam is subject specific, so DC chose two exams that would serve as the closest proxy for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. All students taking geometry or English II, regardless of grade, are included in the PARCC results.

In total, roughly 25 percent of high school students met or exceeded expectations on the English II exam. The District's racial disparities in education are starkly apparent, with only 20 percent of Black students and 25 percent of Hispanic students considered college and career ready, compared to 82 percent of the District's White students. In fact only three percent of Black students scored a five on this exam, compared to 53 percent of White students. Additionally, only 17 percent of economically disadvantaged students scored a four or higher in English.

On Geometry, only 10 percent of all DC students scored at the college and career readiness level. The achievement gap is still apparent with only 4 percent of Black students and 8 percent of Hispanic students scoring a four or five, compared to 52 percent of White students. No Black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged students scored a five on the geometry exam. Roughly 24 percent of all black students scored a one, compared to only 5 percent of White students scoring at that level. These disparities even exist within schools. At Wilson High School, for example, 83 percent of White students were college and career ready, when only 25.6 percent of Black students scored at that level.

### Grades 3-8

Overall scores remained consistent for students across grades 3-8 on the English Language Arts (ELA) PARCC exam. Each grade saw between 23 percent and 26 percent of its students score a four or a five on the exam. The racial disparities at each grade level are more alarming, however. Of all the students in grades 3 through 8 who took the ELA PARCC assessment, roughly 72 percent were Black, 15 percent were Hispanic, and 10 percent were White. While Black students made up almost three-quarters of the test-taking population, only 17 percent of Black students met or exceeded expectations (i.e. scored a four or five) on the ELA PARCC exam. Of this 17 percent, only one percent scored at a level five. This minimal proficiency rate is in stark contrast to the percent of White students who achieved proficiency on the same exam. While White students made up only one-tenth of the test-taking population, 79 percent of white students met or exceeded expectations on the ELA PARCC exam with 25 percent of them scoring at a level five.

The achievement gap on PARCC also exists when examining scores by income. Of all the students in grades 3 through 8 who took the ELA PARCC assessment, approximately 75 percent



of them are classified as economically disadvantaged. While low-income students represented three-quarters of the test-taking population, only 14 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded expectations, and only one percent reached level five.

On the math exams, proficiency scores steadily decline from grades 3-7. Thirty percent of third grade students scored at level four or five, followed by 28 percent of fourth graders, 25 percent of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, 21 percent of 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and 14 percent of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. Seventeen percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders met or exceeded expectations.

As with the ELA exams, the racial achievement gaps persist on the math exams. While Black students made up almost three-quarters of the test-taking population, only 17 percent met or exceeded expectations on the math PARCC exams. On the other hand, 70 percent of white students met or exceeded expectations, with 14 percent of them scoring at a level five.

Economically disadvantaged students made up three-fourths of the math test taking population as well, and only 15 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded expectations.

### **Conclusion**

Washington, D.C. has seen many changes in demographics, school governance, and overall achievement rates over the past decade. What have not changed are the gaps in achievement between races, and between students from high and low-income families. The year 2015 gave the District ample data to remind us of this point, and it should inform the work we do in 2016 and beyond.

