



**Testimony of Rick Cruz  
DC Public Charter School Board  
FY 17 Budget Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Education  
April 12, 2016**

Good afternoon Chairman Grosso and education committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rick Cruz and I am a member of the DC Public Charter School Board and the chair of the finance subcommittee. With me today are Executive Director Scott Pearson and Deputy Director Naomi DeVeaux.

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of public charter schools in the District, and we have come a long way since the first school opened. Today we provide oversight to 62 non-profits which operate 114 schools citywide. While the charter sector market share has stabilized over the years, more parents are choosing public charter schools as families return to DC. In fact, public charter schools now serve more than 39,000 students. That is almost *half* of the DC public school students, and these students live across the city.

Unlike previous years, this is the first time we're operating on the 1% oversight fee, which is modest compared with other authorizers nationwide.

Based on this revenue source, we have built a highly effective model of authorizing which allows us to fulfill our mission: to provide quality public school options for DC students and families.

As more families choose to send their child to a quality public charter school, we hold schools to an ever higher standard. Our performance management framework has become more rigorous, as has our fiscal oversight. We have also hired an English Language Learner (ELL) professional that will provide oversight and advice to us so we can enhance the ELL programs in public charter schools, bringing a level of focus comparable to our initial work on special education years ago.

You will notice that our FY17 budget reflects our priority to increase our capacity to be responsive to families and the community. We expand investment in our website to enhance the user experience, simplifying the way public charter school data is presented and the ways which we make all data publicly available. But an upgraded website is just one facet of our approach toward better communication with the community. The biggest step we have taken to improve our responsiveness is the hiring of our first-ever community engagement specialist. This staff member's charge is to engage with families, ANC's, advocacy organizations, religious groups, education partners and other community stakeholders to ensure that we're hearing from the community before and when issues arise.

While we are increasing our presence in the community and augmenting our ELL programs, we are also focusing resources on redesigning our data architecture so DC PCSB can continue its evolution from a data collector to a data analyzer. In SY 2017-18, we will review and/or renew roughly 17 school's charters. In order to effectively analyze each school's academic and fiscal performance, we will need to hire additional staff to examine how schools are meeting their goals and achieving their mission.

In addition to providing data to the public, DC PCSB is also working to help educators improve their methods. Last year, we co-hosted two free conferences for public and public charter school principals, teachers, and other instructional leaders. One conference focused on improving instruction for English language learned. The other focused on alternatives to exclusionary discipline, with sessions on classroom management and discipline strategies. At the conference, educators learned how to inspire motivation for learning among difficult to reach students and explore what causes students to become unmotivated. It was such a success that we're planning host another conference later this year. But improving classroom methods for students under the age of 16 is not our only focus.

We are also continuing to enhance our adult education schools. Starting in 2011, DC PCSB collaborated with adult education school leaders to develop the Adult Education Performance Management Framework (PMF)

with the aim of improving not only educational skills but English proficiency in students 16 and older. At the end of last year, we released our first adult education quality ratings, which will allow adult learners to have access to better information when selecting a school. We look forward to refining this new framework in the coming years.

While the DC PCSB budget and accountability structures are in sound shape, I would really like to encourage the Council to address the persistent funding and facilities inequities between public charter schools and DCPS. Under the leadership of Mayor Bowser and thanks to the hard work of the Deputy Mayor for Education Niles, we are getting closer to paying schools more equitably, which will allow schools to be paid based on actual enrollment. We look forward to seeing the final outcome.

Finally, we would like to thank Chairman Grosso for his leadership in support of quality schools for all DC students and adult learners.

We are happy to answer any questions you have.