



Testimony of
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Roundtable on Summative Evaluation of PERAA
DC Council Committee on Education
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Thank you Chairman Grosso, members of the Committee on Education, and other councilmembers, for the opportunity to testify today on the summative evaluation of PERAA.

The PERAA report confirms what many who work in education in DC already believed, that much progress has been made in the 8 years since the passage of PERAA, but that there is more work to do.

Without a doubt, there has been significant progress since PERAA. Indeed, a frustration of mine is that the report's dry academic language buries the biggest headline: PERAA has been an outstanding success. Student test scores – at both charters and DCPS – have climbed at astounding rates since PERAA. For the first time in fifty years enrollment at public schools in DC, both charter and DCPS, is

growing. More families are choosing to stay in the District, in no small part because of the improvement they are seeing at their public schools.

Student test scores, as measured by the DC CAS, have also seen a dramatic rise. In public charter schools, the number of students proficient or advanced in math has risen from 39.4% in 2007 to 59.6% in 2014. In reading, proficiency has increased from 42.2% to 53.4% in 2014. Gains were also seen at DCPS schools during this time period.

However, we also recognize that more progress is needed to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve. Persistent achievement gaps remain, and DC's graduation rate, though improved, continues to lag behind the national average. In addition, more than 8,000 students remain on waiting lists for public charter schools. Clearly, demand remains for more opportunities to attend high quality schools – demand that will only grow as the city adds 2 – 3,000 new students each year. PCSB is committed to fulfilling that need by helping current public charter schools improve, authorizing and expanding high performing schools, and closing those that do not set and meet high academic standards for their students.

The passing of PERAA was vital to many important changes for PCSB and public charter schools. First, PERAA left PCSB as the sole and independent authorizer of public charter schools, eliminating a second authorizer that was

widely perceived as troubled, and eliminating the possibility of forum shopping. PERAA also grants PCSB the authority to close schools for poor academic performance. PCSB has used this authority aggressively. In the past three and a half years PCSB has closed 18 charter schools or charter school campuses, the vast majority for poor academic performance. During this same period we've approved 16 new schools to open, using a substantially higher bar for approval than was in place 8 years ago. PCSB instituted a rigorous Performance Management Framework, rating schools as Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. That system is now widely regarded as a national model. Of the 23 schools that have been rated Tier 3 on our Performance Management Framework, we've closed 16. What of the remainder? All but one have improved – some dramatically. Center City PCS - Congress Heights moved from Tier 3 to become a high-performing, Tier 1 school. As the report acknowledges, PCSB has grown stronger and we've strengthened our accountability system since PERAA.

Thanks to quality authorizing, and the exceptionally hard work of our parents, school leaders, teachers and students, public charter school performance has grown for the past seven years and continues to outpace the city average.

PERAA has also facilitated the coordination and collaboration between the charter school sector and the rest of the city. The degree of communication, cooperation, and coordination today versus 8 years ago, is night and day. From our

tight coordination with OSSE on special education enforcement, ESEA waiver implementation, or data collection, to our daily work with the Department of Health on nurses, PCSB is now tightly integrated with the rest of the city government. And, thanks to PERAA and the creation of the office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, this coordination happens at the policy level as well. I could cite a dozen examples of this policy coordination, from transportation optimization to truancy reduction, from common lottery to payment reform, from school closure to common performance reports. None of this was happening before PERAA, and, I suspect, little of it would have happened without PERAA.

Turning to the report, the report laid out a number of recommendations and concerns regarding PCSB and the charter sector, and we would like to address some of those today.

First, the report frequently mentions the difficulty of the authors in finding data about public education in DC, and lamented that less data was available for public charter schools than for DCPS. At PCSB, we believe that data and transparency are vital to the continued improvement of education in DC, and we have made them pillars of our authorizing and oversight of public charter schools. We support the report's recommendation for a comprehensive data warehouse with data for both sectors. We also support continuing to dedicate resources toward the

Statewide Longitudinal Education Database, or SLED, to ensure that it functions at a high-level for years to come.

However, we also want to point out that much of the data asked for by the report can now be found by parents and policymakers on the LearnDC website. This website includes DC's Equity Reports, a collaboration between OSSE, DCPS, PCSB and charter LEAs, that shows school outcomes by subgroup. Countless data on discipline, attendance, student performance, enrollment and school financial records is already collected and reported by OSSE and PCSB, with more possibly coming in legislation on language access, Title IX and charter school fiscal transparency currently being considered by Council, as well as the recently passed PK discipline bill. I would like to urge caution before implementing additional reporting burdens that would take away from vital resources that can be directed toward teaching and learning.

Moreover, much of the data the report writers lament as not available is data relating to inputs, rather than outcomes at the school. This includes data on teacher qualifications, teacher evaluations, and coursework given. Now I'm sure for a researcher this data is endlessly fascinating. But collecting it and reporting it is highly burdensome. What is of greater interest is outcomes: how are students doing, how many graduate? How many earn AP credits? That, I would submit, is where our focus properly should be.

The report also criticizes the “lack of centralized systemwide monitoring” for all public schools. On this claim, we respectfully disagree with the recommendation of the report. The basic public charter school bargain means that schools are given the flexibility to innovate and implement programs that best fit the needs of their students and educational philosophy. In exchange for that flexibility, the schools face the ultimate accountability, closure. This flexibility is not simply a luxury, we believe it is essential to the success of public charter schools.

To enforce that bargain, our approach at PCSB is not to measure inputs, or “learning conditions” as the report states, but rather to focus on the performance of the students in each school. We support incentives, not mandates, to encourage educational best practices. If schools do not perform, they are closed. The report calls several times for improved and more centralized, system-wide “monitoring” but never tells us exactly what is meant. One example given by the report as a potential model for such centralized monitoring is the Key Performance Indicator work done by the Council of Great City Schools. We looked at this data and were frankly horrified. Among the 189 separate data elements they collect are such esoterica as the percentage of exit interviews completed, the percent of school buses using alternate fuels, and the payroll processing expense per check cut. This example only reinforced our fears that what the report is calling for is a slippery

slope toward stifling the very innovation that has made public charter schools successful in DC since PERAA.

I'd like to conclude with two areas where we agree with the report; the need for improved services for students with special needs and the possibility for increased collaboration across education agencies and sectors.

PCSB continues to work with OSSE to ensure that all public charter schools offer appropriate services to all students with special needs and ELL students, and we believe much progress has been made already. The report details the practice of charter schools designating DCPS as the LEA for purposes of special education, which has now ended following legislation passed by the Council last Fall, with the support of PCSB. We are committed to continuing our progress in this area. The report particularly notes the risks to all students, but particularly those at higher risk of failure, that occur during transitions between schools. We believe this is a promising area for future work with our partners.

We are also committed to continuing to improve collaboration across public school sectors and across all education agencies. Already this collaboration, overseen by the DME, has produced excellent results such as the MySchool DC common lottery, the innovative equity reports, LearnDC, and the DC Common Core Collaborative. We look forward to more with the creation of the cross-sector task force currently being formed by the DME, with the shared goal of finding

ways to work together to increase access to quality public schools in DC for all students.

PERAA was a vital and seismic change in the governance of public schools in DC. Since PERAA, we have seen stunning progress, including improved scores, more accountability, and the expansion of high-quality schools: this is nothing less than the revolutionary revitalization of public schooling in DC. That said, we also agree that we need to keep making progress and look forward to working with members of this committee, our colleagues across the city government, our schools, and community members. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and for bringing together all of DC's education agencies to discuss the right path forward. I am happy to take any questions you may have.