



## **Testimony of Naomi Rubin DeVeaux**

**Deputy Director  
DC Public Charter School Board**

### **Hearing on Improving School Attendance Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education September 20, 2018**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and councilmembers - thank you for inviting me to speak today on the issue of truancy and chronic absenteeism in our public charter schools. I am Naomi Rubin DeVeaux, the deputy director for the DC Public Charter School Board.

This last spring, my colleague, Rashida Young had the opportunity to speak with you about the work schools are doing to improve attendance. Since then we have finalized our attendance data for school year (SY) 2017-2018. As you know, the truancy rate in public charter schools and across the city is on the rise. To our dismay, the SY 17-18 data shows there was a 2.8% increase in truancy rates in public charter schools.

We have been working to identify barriers for attendance with the help of charter school leaders, some of whom you have heard from today.

#### Transportation

As we shared last spring, many LEAs identify transportation as the number one reason their students are late or absent. On average, a student who attends a public charter school will travel 2 miles to their elementary school and 2.5 miles to their high school. Many of these students rely on the Kids Ride Free Program in order to get to and from school. However, we have heard anecdotally that is only part of the problem. As we know, the Metrorail and bus systems are not always reliable, don't have optimized routes to help students reach their school with ease, and are often too crowded by the time they reach bus stops. In addition, this solution will only work for older children, whose parents are comfortable letting them ride public transportation unsupervised. There is no public support for students who ride public transportation alone due to the fact their parent is unable to or cannot afford to travel with them. However, we know more holistic solutions are needed to address this complex issue.

#### Healthcare

While health is an excusable absence, it is important to point out that access to affordable healthcare, and in particular asthma treatment, has prevented some students from getting to school. Students often miss school due to illness or due to watching siblings who are unable to attend school. This can also manifest itself if a parent keeps one student home from school due to illness and cannot take the siblings to their schools.

### School Partnership with City Agencies

Our public charter schools have used many interventions and supports to improve attendance and break down some of these barriers for students and families. Our schools have created positive incentives for attendance. They make phone calls to parents and guardians, and schools' Student Support Teams work to set up meetings with parents and create individualized plans to help students get to school. Schools continue to report truant students to the appropriate city agency, either Child and Family Services Agency or Court Social Services.

The vision was for the school to partner with these city agencies to support and encourage families together. However, schools have reported many concerns with this partnership, including lack of follow up in the referral process. Several school leaders say they send in referrals and then receive no response about the status of investigations or open cases. They are not provided information about what, if any, supports are being provided so that the school and agency can work together to help families, and ultimately the school feels their limited benefits from the partnership, as evidenced in the rates. There is also a discrepancy between the number of truancy referrals schools report to us that they submit, and the number of cases city agencies report having received from schools, particularly with Court Social Services. This basic level of data should be easily obtainable.

### DC PCSB Supports

Meanwhile, we continue to hold our schools accountable for their attendance and send notices of concern when a school's truancy rate is higher than allowed by our Attendance and Truancy Policy. We have upgraded our data systems to help schools track their attendance more closely. We hold workshops, including at our next Charter Leaders Meeting, when the Parent and Adolescent Support Services (PASS) will come present to our schools about the support that they can provide. We also appreciate our partnership

with Show Up Stand Out (SUSO). We are working with both agencies to try to remove barriers to ensure they receive the data they need to implement their programs. Our hope, moving forward, is that these agencies will begin to share information more widely so that all partners are working off the same facts and we can begin to understand the outcomes these programs produce more thoroughly.

As mentioned last spring, many of the barriers and issues students face in attending school require more support and work outside of the school setting and schools need more help in addressing these issues. Increasing attendance continues to be a priority for DC PCSB and charter LEAs. And we remain an active member of the Every Day Counts! Taskforce. At the most recent meeting last month, we heard many of the same concerns school leaders shared with us today. Members of our Equity and Fidelity Team, who oversee all non-academic aspects of school performance, have recently worked with PASS and SUSO to support with data sharing and best practices.

Our hope is that through continued work with the Every Day Counts! Taskforce and other partners, continued data collection and sharing, and improved coordination between government agencies, truancy and chronic absenteeism highs will start to recede. I want to thank you again for your time and for inviting us to speak today on this important and urgent issue. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.