



**Testimony of Naomi Rubin DeVeaux  
Deputy Director  
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**Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and  
the Implementation of Reform Initiative  
Committee of the Whole  
October 23, 2017**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso and Councilmembers, my name is Naomi Rubin DeVeaux and I am the Deputy Director of the DC Public Charter School Board. With me today is Rashida Young, our Equity and Fidelity Senior Manager. Rashida and her team oversee non-academic public indicators of charter school quality, including attendance and truancy.

After the adoption and implementation of new business rules in response to the School Attendance Clarification Amendment Act of 2015, the public charter school truancy rate rose just under than 2%, from 19.9% to 21.7%. While not a huge increase, after years of declining truancy rates and increasing attendance rates, it caused us to re-examine and reprioritize our work in this area.

Currently, our role in the city's efforts to reduce truancy includes providing schools with up-to-date comparable data and support them in their efforts to monitor their own rates. Reinforcing this work is our truancy policy: we bring schools before our board for a notice of concern when their truancy rate exceeds 30% for elementary and middle schools, 35% for high schools, and 45% for DC PCSB designated "alternative" schools. These notices of concern can affect schools' growth plans, ability to borrow money, and even their charter reviews and renewals. Last year, by May, two schools had rates that exceeded those thresholds and received a Notice of Concern.

We also include in-seat attendance rates in our calculation of our School Quality scores. Schools with low attendance rates, which can translate to high truancy rates, have a much more difficult time achieving Tier One status, which all schools strive to attain.

While holding them to high standards for results, our role as the authorizer requires us to respect schools' exclusive control over their attendance and truancy policies. But it also allows us to look across schools and highlight best practices for all of our school. We do this each year at our school leaders meetings and at other city-wide events.

For example, one school recently gave a presentation on their best practices to the Every Day Counts! Taskforce. Reducing their rates involved calling parents after the 5<sup>th</sup> absence and sharing how many minutes of instruction the student missed. It also included identifying monthly trends such as drops around the holidays and proactively engaging students by giving away prizes. The school also identifies students who are in danger through early intervention monitoring, triggered when the number of absences start to pile up.

Another school, recognizing the urgency, pledged to increase its resources, including creating a new staff position to provide wraparound services for students with attendance. Another school found many students had problems with truancy due to medical issues, which should have been marked as excused absences. This school put in place measures to improve communication between the attendance officer and the parent liaison, and addressed the issue by implementing a user-friendly form for parents to use to excuse legitimate absences.

In our conversations with schools and analysis of the results, we believe the “five-day rule” of the new regulations have contributed to the uptick in the truancy rate. Schools used to have more flexibility in the time it took to collect excused absence documentation; now all schools must collect that documentation in five days. We have heard feedback from schools that they are simply not able to get parent or doctor notes within that time frame.

We have also heard that many school leaders focus more on in-seat attendance as a metric. They want to spend their energy and resources making sure kids are in school, regardless of unexcused or excused status, as opposed to focusing their resources on tracking down excuse notes from parents.

We are committed to increasing in-seat attendance and reducing truancy. We have been active members of the truancy taskforce since its inception and Rashida Young continues to actively participate in the Every Day Counts! Taskforce, and we have taken the Every Day Counts! Pledge. The goals of the taskforce in the next year are to raise awareness, promote mentorship of students, promote best practices, and ultimately reduce truancy by 3% citywide. We support these goals.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. We would be happy to answer any questions.