



**Testimony of Scott Pearson
Executive Director
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Roundtable on Graduation Accountability
Committee on Education
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Chairman Grosso, members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Scott Pearson, Executive Director of the DC Public Charter School Board.

After the news broke about some DC public schools not following graduation policies with respect to attendance and credit recovery, we began to examine our own attendance and graduation policies. As you may know, every diploma issued by a public charter school is signed by DCPCSB's board chair. Before we sign a diploma, we conduct a rigorous audit of the graduating student's transcript to assure that student has earned the credits required by the school's graduation policy. If a student earned a credit through credit recovery, we ensure this program was taken after the student completed and failed the initial class.

One thing we haven't done in the past is look at attendance data. Some of our schools tie attendance to course passage; others do not.

When the news about Ballou broke, we retroactively looked at attendance data for the 2017 graduates of public charter schools. We found that eight students with more than 60 unexcused absences had graduated. Six of these students attended alternative high schools.

In the future, we will include an examination of attendance in our annual transcript audit.

OSSE's report outlined several steps DCPCSB should take to make our process and school policies transparent. We intend to follow through on those recommendations. I can commit today to doing five things which I believe will strengthen the integrity of DC diplomas for DC public charter school students.

1. As of a last week, DCPCSB posted HS graduation requirements for all high schools on each school's profile page. We will update the information annually. Additionally, we added a page on our website about graduations. On that page, users can find graduation requirements for each school as well as our transcript audit policy.

2. Prior SY 18-19, we will revise our HS Course Catalog requirement to include Memoranda of Understanding between parents and schools. Schools will be required to include an explanation of their MOU process (e.g., what time(s) of year they provide parents with the MOUs, and next steps after parents sign/ don't sign). Our hope is that this level of interaction will help parents, students and schools develop a better understanding of what it takes to earn a diploma from each LEA.

3. We will also modify our HS Course Catalog requirement to include credit recovery policies. Schools' credit recovery policy must include eligibility for participation, how students are referred or assigned to credit recovery, where and when credit recovery courses take place, and how credit recovery credits are earned. This requirement will take effect in the summer of 2018.

4. As you may know, DCPCSB already collects and reviews LEA attendance policies. During the transcript audit, we will review all students' attendance and check for compliance for schools that include attendance as part of their course promotion policies. This will also be formally revised in our transcript audit process and open for public comment shortly.

5. Finally, DCPCSB will continue to use the transcript audit excel spreadsheet we have used for the past several years but will include on the spreadsheet the names of specific courses required for graduation in DC. For example, auditors will not only check for four years of Science, but they will also ensure Lab Science has been completed. This is already done during our audits, but by adding the specific course names to the spreadsheet we are codifying our practice.

Additionally, we are proposing a new policy codifying our existing practice that credit recovery may only be taken to make up for a failed course. And we are proposing to modify two policies. One, our graduation policy, will clarify that any waiver from a school's graduation policy must be approved by the school's board, and be consistent with that school's waiver policy. The other, our transcript audit policy, will make it clear that we will be auditing attendance.

We will continue to look at ways we can make the graduation process more transparent and strengthen it. Our policies will reflect these changes in practice and we look forward to working with our partners in education to get it right.

Before I conclude my testimony, I would like to propose that as a city, we work toward instituting a graduation competency test. Last fall, DC school leaders were fortunate enough to travel to Denver as part of the cross-sector task force. During the course of our journey, we learned that Denver instituted a competency option. The options measure competency for potential graduates across a number of options such as scoring at least a 3

on an AP exam, completing a district-approved capstone project or scoring a 430 or higher on the SAT. I believe that DC could benefit from the creation of such requirements that will help ensure students are ready for college or career and it will show the rest of the country that the value of a DC diploma is high.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.