



**Testimony of Rick Cruz
Chairperson
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Hearing on the District of Columbia Education Research Advisory
Board and Collaborative Establishment Amendment Act of 2018**

**Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education
July 13, 2018**

Chairpersons Mendelson, Grosso, and Councilmembers, my name is Rick Cruz and I am the Chair of the DC Public Charter School Board. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the District of Columbia Education Research Advisory Board and Collaborative Establishment Amendment Act of 2018.

The DC Public Charter School Board is fully supportive of this bill's goal to more deeply understand what all of our schools can do to fully serve our students. We also completely support more robust analysis of the progress we have made over the past decade of reforming our school system. And, we entirely respect the role of the DC Auditor to look into all aspects of our work. The auditor is an important part of our government's accountability structure.

We have seen the success of research consortiums in a few places, most notably in Chicago, and we are excited by the prospect of bringing that type of resource to DC for our schools and educators. Chicago Public Schools learns valuable information from the research undertaken by their University of Chicago-led collaborative. Just last week the journal *Governing* profiled the reforms underway at CPS and the ways in which the partnership with the Consortium supports these efforts. In my non-PCSB capacity I've had the privilege of meeting with leaders and researchers at the Chicago Consortium—seen firsthand the various data they've collected and, importantly, the ways that they work with Chicago Public Schools at the district level and at the school level—the tools and the materials that they create to make their findings concretely usable by principals and administrators. Through the course of their work— and over many years—the consortium has done some fantastic analysis on many of the same issues we face in DC, such as improving attendance, improving on-track and graduation rates, and student mobility. As well, the consortium has been able to liaise with other research institutions nationally to share findings, and

to align on best practices and benchmarks. This is exactly the type of resource and support we could use in DC.

All that said, I have some concerns with the proposed bill. My biggest concern, as someone who has worked closely with both schools and research institutions, is that the research and auditing functions, as written, are intertwined. While I am not opposed to either the research or the audit function operating independently of each other, I am not sure how the offices would work together and what unintended implications that relationship would have for the outcomes of both.

My understanding is that the Chicago consortium's success stems from their independence - from political pressure, from operating pressures—by being housed within a university. Their relationship with Chicago Public Schools is one of partnership, this and the consortium's service orientation, produces willing buy-in of schools. To replicate this success in DC, we would hope that this new research entity would be housed within a non-profit or at a university that has similar independence. Chicago is not alone in this—you see this foundational structural element in what other jurisdictions have set up, including Los Angeles and Baltimore. We believe this approach will better serve students and the aims of both Council and school leaders.

If a research body is housed in the DC auditor's office, schools may be hesitant to work as cooperatively than they otherwise may be, given the inherent watchdog nature of the office of the auditor, and the possibility of negative attention on their program. As the Chicago consortium states in a 2009 report "[Consortium] researchers do not just comprise an independent group that does studies on schools and occasionally announces findings. Rather, [their] studies and products (for example, the individual school reports) are resources that practitioners use to manage their own improvement efforts." This is an incredibly important element of their success. It is clear from Chicago's own analysis that the research and analysis that we are talking about undertaking needs to be done by experts in the field with the utmost thoughtfulness, and with the trust of schools.

Finally, I urge this Council to think carefully about any impacts this new body or bodies would have on OSSE and its data team, and the work currently underway at the agency. The high-stakes and time-sensitive accountability work of the DC Public Charter School Board depends on getting timely data from OSSE. We rely on this data to produce everything from our School Quality Reports, to our charter review and renewal reports, and many of the reports we submit to Council. If we get this data late, it affects our ability to fulfill our commitment to families and to schools and to all of you.

Over the past four years, the city has invested significantly in OSSE's capacity to collect data. While still a work in progress, OSSE's data capabilities have improved meaningfully. Shifting, or adding, to OSSE's responsibilities at this juncture could undermine or undo the progress made. It is critical that we ensure the quality, timeliness, and security of student-level data. If the Council uses this bill to deepen the commitment to OSSE's data collection infrastructure and personnel tasked with handling data, the research collaborative will be best positioned to reach its goal of producing new insights from the wealth of student and school-level data that OSSE manages and currently makes publicly available.

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