

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of the State Superintendent of Education



PERAA Roundtable

**Testimony of
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Before the

Committee on Education

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Good afternoon Chairman Grosso, members, and staff of the Committee on Education. My name is Hanseul Kang and I am the State Superintendent at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). I am pleased to testify before you today on the release of the report by the National Academy of Sciences in partnership with the D.C. Auditor, titled “An Evaluation of Public Schools in the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape.”

The report makes a number of observations, recommendations and conclusions about education in the District. Importantly, it notes the significant progress that has been made in student achievement results in recent years. It also highlights the troubling gaps between groups of students that persist in our system.

The report also notes that OSSE’s performance has not been consistently effective in the years since its inception and that it is not always fully trusted by its stakeholders. The broad conclusions of the report as it pertains to OSSE align with what I have heard from my early conversations with the DC Council, members of the State Board of Education, LEA leaders, the Public Charter School Board, community organizations, and finally, the staff at OSSE. OSSE has done some very hard and very good work, but there is no question that the challenges of standing up a large new agency, leadership and staff turnover, and lack of management structures, systems and routines have held us back from performing at a consistently high level

I believe that having OSSE operate as an effective state education agency can make an enormous impact in DC’s efforts to ensure a quality education for all students. In particular, OSSE has an important role to play in providing consistent, accurate, high-quality data about all of our schools, in ensuring equity for all students, especially those students who have been furthest behind, and in supporting our LEAs and schools in their efforts. I appreciate the report’s highlighting of these areas, and will provide some additional context and comments in my testimony today.

Data Systems

Data systems and the ability to share information and use data to improve outcomes for students have been a key area of focus for the District and for this committee. The report indicates that PERAA called for the development of a data infrastructure to support interagency collaboration, concludes that the infrastructure does not yet exist, and recommends the development of a centralized data warehouse.

DC’s Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLED) had some early challenges, but today, it is an important and integral foundation to our education system. It has allowed us to connect sources of data that were never connected before, allowing for meaningful analysis across domains and over time. In fact, SLED has been nationally recognized by the Education Commission of the States and the Data Quality Campaign as providing high-quality, user friendly information, and is also a leader among states in connecting to health and human services information systems. We are also unique in connecting with non-profits that provide services to students outside of school, through the College and Credential Completion Network and Raise DC. Already, SLED has allowed us to make some important strides in better coordinating services for students. For example, while in the past we received some information on homeless students, it was often incomplete and out-of-date. We now have a direct data feed from homeless shelters to SLED, which allows schools to know which students may need additional services, as well as to ensure the schools receive the at-risk funding to support those services,

and allows OSSE to look at which schools have large numbers of homeless students to see where we can provide technical assistance and additional resources. The data connection has also strengthened cross-agency collaboration between OSSE, the Department of Human Services, and organizations that serve homeless students so that we can provide more coordinated support.

At the same time, the report is correct in stating that SLED is not a data warehouse, at this point. Developing a data warehouse would not only allow for the kinds of connections that SLED currently provides, but would also be a much more structured and formalized system that identified the authoritative data sets for particular types of information.

We have the resources and capacity within OSSE's current budget to maintain SLED as it currently exists, and are continuing to add some additional features over time. Last year, we launched LearnDC a portal that provides school level information that is accessible to parents and other stakeholders. We are working with the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) to increase coordination and reduce duplication in data collection. For example, we will add attendance data to SLED in 2015-16, and PCSB will be using SLED to calculate attendance rates rather than maintaining a separate system. We are also working with PCSB and charter LEAs on a plan for coordinated collection and reporting of discipline data, per the legislation that was passed by the Council. In addition, we are also adding new functionality to help LEAs and schools use data to improve instruction, through a new reporting tool called Qlik.

However, it is also true that building SLED into a true data warehouse will require additional investments, to build both the data architecture and do the foundational work of ensuring clean, quality data sets that can be used over time. We recently submitted a grant application to the U.S. Department of Education to provide additional resources for the next phase of our data work. We also look forward to continuing discussions with the Council about additional investments in future budget cycles. Specifically, we plan to have a roadmap for building out the data systems and infrastructure needed by December 2015.

Special Education

The PERAA report notes that DC has had a history of challenges in serving students with disabilities. We fully agree that providing students with special needs with the support and opportunities they deserve is a fundamentally important part of our educational system. However, there has also been some tremendous progress made in special education compliance, services, supports, and outcomes over the last few years.

As the report notes, the District was released from the remaining portion of the Blackman-Jones litigation (Jones et. al. v. District of Columbia) in December 2014, after 17 years of federal judicial oversight. This followed the 2012 release from oversight from the 1995 class-action suit, Petties v. DC, and in 2011, the release from the Blackman portion of the Blackman-Jones litigation. In its last filings, DC was able to show that it had been able to reduce the percentage of students placed in non-public settings while also seeing a significant decline in the due process complaints filed by parents and families since 2011.

The releases from these long-standing court cases that predated the creation of OSSE show the courts' confidence in the District's ability to sustain a durable system of special education in the

city. This important progress was achieved through the hard work of OSSE staff in partnership with LEAs and other stakeholders.

It is particularly significant that this progress has been achieved at the same time that DC is making important strides in student achievement. Specifically, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the growth for DC's students with disabilities between 2011 and 2013 outpaced the nation. NAEP reading scores for DC fourth grade students with disabilities improved by six points between 2011 and 2013, while falling by two points nationally. Math scores for these DC students improved by eleven points over the same period, while remaining flat nationally (National Assessment of Educational Progress, <http://nces.ed.gov>). NAEP reading scores for DC eighth graders with disabilities improved by eight points between 2011 and 2013, while improving by one point nationally. Math scores for these DC students improved by nine points over the same period, while falling by one point nationally (National Assessment of Educational Progress, <http://nces.ed.gov>).

In addition, special education is an area where we continue to be heavily involved in monitoring and oversight of LEAs. We share monthly reports with LEAs on any student records overdue for initial evaluation or reevaluation, to continue a focus on increasing compliance with federal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We also have a robust program for monitoring of LEAs under IDEA. Our current monitoring system includes quarterly database reviews, scheduled on-site monitoring, unscheduled on-site monitoring, and focused monitoring, an intensive, targeted monitoring "clinic" that begins with targeted record review with school staff related to a particular challenge. After this initial "clinic", OSSE continues oversight for eight months. OSSE also requires LEAs identified by an annual risk analysis to complete self-studies on particular compliance issues, such as disproportionate representation or discipline of students with disabilities. In all cases, findings of noncompliance are made and correction is closely tracked by dedicated OSSE points of contact, using an electronic database, the DC Corrective Action Tracking System, which provides real-time updates.

Over the past year, OSSE has also worked with stakeholders to develop a State Special Education Improvement Plan (SSIP), a six year strategic plan for improving outcomes for students with disabilities in DC submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. DC's plan focuses on high school graduation. OSSE developed DC's plan with stakeholders, through a data analysis process that led to the development of coherent improvement strategies. For example, OSSE is working with a group of stakeholders on the issue of highly mobile student populations, of which many are students with disabilities, and helping these students stay on track for graduation.

We are also continuously expanding our professional development approaches and partnerships. Examples include the development of a standards-aligned specialized instruction lesson plan generator, designed with teachers from across DC, the creation of a community of practice to support instruction of secondary students with IEPs, and our work in partnership with the Department of Behavioral Health and Child and Family Services Administration related to trauma-informed intervention and effective behavior support.

English Language Learners

We agree with the report on the importance of focusing on the growing English Language Learner (ELL) population in DC. We are part of the WIDA consortium, a group of states that has come together to improve standards and assessments related to language development and

proficiency. We are pleased to share that we are launching a summer ELL institute in August, to kick off a city-wide planning effort around ELL support. This effort will include our Committee of Practitioners, WIDA, as well as DCPS, PCSB, and charter LEAs. Together we will map out a strategic plan for further enhancing support to English Language Learners beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.

Equitable Access

Another concern raised in the report was the lack of access to excellent and effective teachers in every ward. Earlier this month, OSSE submitted our plan to ensure equitable access to excellent educators for all students in the District to the U.S. Department of Education. We are awaiting comments and feedback from the department and will post the final plan on our website once it has been approved. In the plan, we looked at the distribution of teachers in schools across the city, by level of effectiveness in evaluation ratings and in terms of first year teacher status. We saw that students are less likely to be assigned to an effective teacher, if they attend a school that is located in Ward 7 or 8, serves a high poverty population, and has a history of low performance. We did not find significant gaps when measuring the access to experienced teachers.

As outlined in our plan, we will work with LEAs to identify and share strategies to address these gaps in access to effective teachers. Specifically, we plan to overhaul our current teacher licensure system, which has been identified by DCPS as a significant barrier to their efforts to attract and retain effective teachers. We also plan to explore whether there is additional data or information on educator preparation programs that might be helpful to LEAs and schools, to expand our supports for LEAs and for school leaders through professional development in areas like behavioral health and trauma-informed instruction, and to potentially develop a staffing data cooperative that would help LEAs to examine their own data and perform their own root-cause analyses to determine other levers for tackling equity issues.

Planning Process

The report also calls for a systematic evaluation of OSSE's current structure, operations, and priorities. As noted above, OSSE has made some substantial progress over its first eight years, and has many very talented and hardworking individuals who are doing great work. At the same time, I agree that an evaluation is needed, and have recently launched a strategic planning effort that is helping me to understand at a more detailed level the work that takes place at OSSE, the current strengths within the organization that we can build on, areas for improvement, and stakeholders' experiences and perspectives. Using the collective insights of leadership and staff members within the building as well as stakeholder perspectives, we will develop a plan that will carry us forward for the next several years. I look forward to sharing more information about OSSE's strengths, areas for improvement, priorities and direction with the committee in the coming months.

Conclusion

This report has been instrumental in noting the progress made in DC education over the last several years and highlighting the work that still remains to be done. I was reassured to see that we are on the right path as a city, and I am committed to improving the consistency and efficacy of OSSE which is critical to reaching the next phase of work in DC. I look forward to continuing this dialogue with members of the Committee, other education agencies, LEAs, schools, and

stakeholders as we all seek to provide our students with the educational opportunities they deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.