

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



Fiscal Year 2015 Performance Oversight Public Hearing

Testimony of

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State Superintendent

Before the

Committee on Education
Chairman David Grosso

February 17, 2016
Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good Morning Chairman Grosso and members and staff of the Education Committee. My name is Hanseul Kang, and I am the State Superintendent of Education.

I am pleased to testify before you today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Performance. As you know, the Mayor has established an ambitious agenda to improve the city by creating opportunities for residents and supporting pathways to the middle class. Education is a key priority in these efforts. She has charged us with accelerating the pace of school reform in the District of Columbia.

In recent months, OSSE has developed a strategic plan to guide our priorities for the next several years and ensure we can become a consistently highly effective state education agency. In this testimony, I'll speak briefly about our strategic plan and the key priorities we've identified, and also speak to a few of the highlights of the agency's work during FY15.

Our strategic plan was developed through extensive feedback, including many conversations with external stakeholders and our internal staff, as well as through research and analysis. It is premised on the recognition that there has been tremendous progress taking place in DC education, but that we all know there is much more that needs to happen for our students. We believe that OSSE can play a unique role in **sustaining, accelerating, and deepening** the progress being made in DC education by successfully carrying out four key priorities: High Quality and Actionable Data, Quality and Equity Focus, Responsive and Consistent Service, and Top-Notch Talent.

I'll begin with the focus on High Quality and Actionable Data, which I will also discuss later in the testimony. We believe that OSSE is uniquely positioned to support schools, educators, and families in using data to make informed decisions, and that doing so is a powerful lever for advancing outcomes for our students. As part of our strategic plan, OSSE has identified strategies for making this potential impact a reality, including providing high-quality, reliable, integrated and secure data systems; and developing timely and relevant reports and analyses for our LEAs and schools to help strategic decision making, and highlight promising practices.

Our next two key priorities are Quality and Equity Focus and Responsive and Consistent Service, which you will hear about when I share more about our highlights from the past year. For OSSE, these mean working with our education partners to ensure we have high expectations for program quality and to align incentives to accelerate achievement for those learners most in need, and that we will provide responsive, consistent and considerate customer service to free up our local education agencies (LEAs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and providers and allow them to focus on instruction and support for students. One of the most important components of responsive and consistent service is better understanding the needs and

perspectives of our stakeholders. To that end, I personally have visited 22 LEAs so far this school year, and plan on visiting every LEA as well as DCPS schools in each ward by next October.

Finally, our fourth strategic priority is Top-Notch Talent, building on the Mayor's efforts to attract, develop, and retain great talent throughout DC government. By doing this, we will build a highly effective state education agency that makes a meaningful contribution to DC education. Last summer, we launched an organization-wide staff survey to better understand our staffs' needs and perspectives. Based on the survey results and feedback, we're taken steps to improve internal communication and understanding of organizational priorities, including quarterly in-person all-hands meetings and more frequent messages from me to all staff, and are also investing in building the capacity of our organization through a robust training for all managers at every level of the agency. We want to improve workplace culture so that all staff feel valued and supported, and empower our staff through training, development and opportunities for growth.

It is this strategic framework that will help us focus our work moving forward. With that context, I would like to share some highlights of our work over the past year. These highlights are the result of OSSE's dedicated staff, working in partnership with the State Board of Education, the District of Columbia Public Schools, the Public Charter School Board, local education agencies (LEAs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) across the city.

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS RESULTS

The results of the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called the Nation's Report Card, demonstrated that DC students have made sustained and significant improvement from 2013 to 2015. The District of Columbia achieved the largest gains of any state in fourth grade reading, with average scale scores for students increasing seven points. Average scale scores for fourth grade students in math increased three points between 2013 and 2015. DC was one of only three states to see improvements in fourth grade math and one of 13 states to improve in fourth grade reading. These results were particularly encouraging because the students making these gains have engaged with more rigorous instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards for their entire academic careers. It is inspiring to see this demonstration of our students' progress and we hope to continue to build on it in years to come.

PARCC IMPLEMENTATION

In the 2014-15 school year, the District implemented the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), demonstrating the District's commitment to supporting college and career readiness. PARCC replaced the DC Comprehensive Assessment

System (DC CAS) as our annual measure of students' learning outcomes in English and math, and the first year results set a new baseline for student performance. The PARCC assessment is designed to present a more authentic picture of student learning, and to better measure students' progress in acquiring the skills and knowledge that will allow them to be successful in college and in the workplace. Last week, the Fordham Institute and the Human Resources Research Organization released new studies highlighting the high quality of the PARCC assessment in measuring the breadth and depth of the Common Core State Standards. In addition, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year released a study last fall speaking to these top teachers' perspective on the quality of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments relative to previous state tests.

While we know the PARCC assessment is of high quality and represents an important step forward, we also know our baseline results in this first year show that we have a long way to go in ensuring our students are on track to be ready for college and careers. In grades 3-8 and in high school English, we saw that about a quarter of our students were on track for college and career readiness, and in high school math, only about 10 percent of our students met that bar. We also saw troubling gaps along lines of race, income, special education and English learner status. At the same time, we know that our students did not learn less or our schools teach less than they did in the past. We know that the struggles of students from DC and across the country in postsecondary have been clear for a long time, even when they were showing proficiency on previous state assessments, and we now have better data and information about how to tackle gaps in readiness. We also know that this was the first year of a very different type of assessment and we are optimistic and confident that we will see gains over time.

As a member of the PARCC consortium, DC has been able to administer a high-quality assessment and provide a suite of resources for students, parents, and educators to support instruction. In addition to student-level score reports shared with parents and educators and an interactive public platform to view the results at the state, LEA and school levels, there are a variety of online tools that support student skill development. For example, students, families and educators have access to full-length practice tests and online tutorials that provide practice on the computer-based testing format and support skill development. PARCC also provides educators with unprecedented access to released test items, as well as scoring rubrics, and sample scored student work. We look forward to continuing to share additional tools and resources that help students engage with rich and rigorous content.

PARCC IMPLEMENTATION IN 2015-16

This spring, schools across the District will administer the PARCC assessment to students for the second time. This year's test will be administered in a single testing window and it will be about 90 minutes shorter in each grade, due to changes made by the consortium in response to

feedback from states, LEAs and schools. Results from the 2016 assessment will also be available much sooner than after the first year of administration. In alignment with the strategic plan, OSSE will continue to enhance the data and information available to support educators, families, and policymakers in leveraging the data the assessment provides to support continuous improvement of our city's educational system.

OSSE is committed to responsive and consistent customer service to improve upon our support for schools and LEAs in implementing the assessment. We are hosting comprehensive trainings for test coordinators to ensure that all schools will be prepared for assessment implementation. The first training was held last week and we received feedback from attendees that the sessions were valuable in supporting schools in understanding policies, guidelines, and best practices. Another training will be held today, and a third will be held in early March. Additionally, we have clarified accommodations guidance this year for students with special needs. Finally, OSSE and other PARCC states have worked with the testing vendor to improve immediate technical assistance and customer service for schools during the testing window.

GRANTS MANAGEMENT

As the state education agency, one of OSSE's primary functions is to distribute federal and local grants to LEAs, CBOs and organizations. We hope to be effective stewards of these funds, to implement efficient systems that support high-quality programs, and to streamline the time that grant recipients must spend on administration, leaving more time for their work with students.

OSSE has made great strides in reducing the amount of federal grant funds lapsed, ensuring that more of these crucial resources get to the students and schools who can benefit from them. In FY12, over \$7 million was lapsed, and in each year since, there has been a significant reduction. In FY13, \$1.2 million was lapsed, in FY14, \$913,000 was lapsed. I am pleased to share that in FY15, less than \$50,000 was lapsed, representing .03% of our total expiring federal grant awards.

This tremendous progress is a testament to the hard work of schools, LEAs, and providers and OSSE staff. It also demonstrates the return on the investment in the Enterprise Grants Management System (EGMS), which was launched in 2014 and developed with capital funds. EGMS is a web-based system that permits users to apply for grants and access key financial information regarding awarded grants, and provides a number of features to reduce administrative burden and more easily track grant funds. For example, EGMS allows grant recipients to view a summary of all grants, including amount received, payments to date, and the remaining balance. The system also allows for viewing of pending and completed reimbursement requests. Additionally, EGMS provides a breakdown of funds by current year and prior year, to help grantees stay apprised of any funds due to expire at the end of the year. As a result of these

features, grant recipients and OSSE staff are better able to track grant funds and proactively address any cases where funds may be at risk of lapsing. EGMS automatically pays the oldest funds first, also contributing to a reduction in potential lapsed funds. OSSE continues to add features to EGMS to better meet user needs. For example, since last year, we added a feature to upload reimbursement requests, rather than manually entering each line of the request, which saves grantees time when making requests.

OSSE is also taking steps to better align the availability and disbursement of funds with school year cycles and needs, to the extent possible. For example, we worked very hard this year to plan for and administer the grant competitions for both the Early Literacy Grant and the Community Schools Grant in the late summer and early fall, so that funds could be distributed in October, at the beginning of the fiscal year in which they became available.

We look forward to continuing to improve our management of grants and the experience of grant recipients over time.

STATE DIPLOMA

In alignment with OSSE's focus on equity and increasing opportunity for all District residents, OSSE and the State Board of Education developed and approved a policy to grant a state diploma to provide increased economic and educational opportunities for more District residents. We heard feedback from many adult education students and programs that District residents who lack a diploma are at a competitive disadvantage for job opportunities in the District and the surrounding area. Neighboring Maryland, Virginia, and a number of other states award a diploma to adults who pass or complete state-approved high school equivalency exams and programs.

The State Board approved the regulations for the state diploma on January 20th. The state diploma now affords the approximately 60,000 District residents that lack a high school diploma with the opportunity to earn a credential that opens the door to new career opportunities and greater earnings. We look forward to following up with LEAs and adult education providers with further details to ensure our students have full access to this new credential.

IMPROVEMENTS TO STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

OSSE's student transportation division is charged with providing safe, reliable, efficient transportation services that positively support learning opportunities for eligible District students. On average, in FY15, OSSE-DOT transported 2,940 students per day to schools along 535 bus routes, traveling more than 26,000 miles per day. During FY15, OSSE-DOT continued

to pursue a standard of excellence, maintaining an average 96.6% success rate of student riders arriving daily to school before the bell rings.

To further improve the special education transportation system, DOT implemented the Automated Event Notification Service for the parent and stakeholder community that provides real-time information on circumstances like bus delays, route changes, and service updates as well as inclement weather-related alerts, and other relevant announcements regarding student transportation services via voice call or text message. In September 2015, the system was updated to allow for route-specific notifications to the parents and families of students along a particular route, rather than only blanket communications to all students. Student-specific notifications are currently under development and will go into effect for the 2016-17 school year, allowing for communication of student-specific schedule changes and delays so that only the parents and guardians of the students affected by a change are notified.

DATA SECURITY

Finally, I would be remiss not to acknowledge a recent incident that I know is of great concern to all of us. On Tuesday, February 9, it was brought to OSSE's attention that two files submitted as part of our performance oversight hearing responses inadvertently disclosed personally identifiable student information. The two files were available on a publicly accessible site for several hours on Tuesday, February 9, and included information on approximately 12,000 students with individualized education plans (IEPs). Social Security numbers, dates of birth, and addresses were NOT included in those records.

Upon realization of this accidental disclosure, OSSE immediately had the files removed from the website, completed a review of all other files and confirmed that no other inadvertent data disclosures were present. Subsequently we took urgent action to follow protocols for notification of potentially affected families.

This includes:

- Issuing a public statement to the community on OSSE's website;
- Establishing a dedicated hotline and email address for parents;
- Sending a breach remediation letter asking individuals who may have had access to the file to certify destruction and non-disclosure of that data;
- Distributing through LEAs, a letter to parents of students who have been affected. The letter has been translated into Amharic, Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese, emailed to LEA leaders and special education points of contact as well as non-public school leaders, and posted on OSSE's website; and
- For our students who receive special education transportation services, sending an automated call to their families to notify them of the situation; and distributing notification letters through our transportation staff.

While available analytics information shows access to OSSE's files – and the specific files at issue with this disclosure – was relatively limited, this accidental disclosure should not have happened. During the last year, OSSE has taken several steps to ensure the confidentiality of student information, including a complete overhaul of our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process and a new data request process.

We believe these new routines have been rigorous and thorough, but unfortunately, this disclosure happened in a context outside the processes and routines we have established.

However, this lapse is clearly unacceptable for our agency, our schools, and our families and students. Going forward, OSSE will redouble our efforts to ensure the security of our students' information. I am deploying additional staff resources and inviting in external experts to review and re-evaluate our internal processes and procedures. In order to fulfill our mission and vision we must be consummate stewards of the information and data entrusted to us, and we can and will do better.

CLOSING

To conclude, OSSE will continue to work to realize our mission, with the strategic plan as our guide. Through the plan, we have committed as an agency to excellence in analyzing education data to inform practice and policy, upholding quality and equity of programs, serving our customers more effectively, and attracting and retaining top-notch talent for the agency. We are looking forward to building on this year's successes in an effort to ensure that students of all ages in the District receive a high quality education.

I would like to once again thank OSSE's dedicated and hardworking staff. In addition, I would like to thank the Council for your continued leadership. I am happy to address any questions you may have for me.