

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION**



**Public Roundtable on PR 26-165, “State Superintendent of Education Dr.
Antoinette Mitchell Confirmation Resolution of 2025”**

**Testimony of
Dr. Antoinette S. Mitchell
Acting State Superintendent of Education
Office of the State Superintendent of Education**

**Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman**

April 23, 2025
10:00 AM
Council of the District of Columbia

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. My name is Dr. Antoniette Mitchell, and I am honored to be nominated by Mayor Muriel Bowser as the State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia.

I come from a family who always valued education. My family is originally from South Carolina, where my mom's family was rumored to have owned a brickmaking machine, and my dad's family were farmers. My mother attended a Rosenwald School during her elementary years and eventually went to Claflin College, a small HBCU in Orangeburg, South Carolina. There she met my dad, a veteran attending on the G.I. Bill. They both became educators and worked at the same school until they migrated to the District of Columbia in 1954, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Here in DC, they found new jobs in education, bought a house in Mt. Pleasant, grew their family, and provided the foundation I needed to grow and thrive. My mother, who just turned 100 years old, continues to live in the same house where I grew up and where she is cheering me on today.

I was born and raised right here in the District. I am a proud product of our public school system. I attended Bancroft Elementary School, Alice Deal Middle School, and Wilson, now Jackson-Reed, High School. Through my elementary and secondary school experience, I was privileged to sit before transformational educators who entranced and inspired me. I remember Mrs. Francis Murray. She wore a dashiki and her hair in an Afro. She considered our “rap circles,” the time when we would sit cross-legged on the floor and talk about our community, as important as learning to read and write. I recall Ms. Clark, who made us draft, re-write, and polish essays every week and then showed us the tremendous improvement in our writing from the first essay in September to the last essay in June. She made us aware of and proud of our growth. I remember Ms. Miles and Ms. Medley, who team-taught an English and US History class. I learned from them the value of inter-disciplinary studies. And I recall all of the special projects in Ms. Clair Roundtree’s 9th grade biology class and Mr. Stechshulte’s AP English class that prepared me for college level work. School, for me, was always a magical place, headed by great leaders: Ms. Stafford at Bancroft, Reginald Moss at Deal, and Mike Durso at Wilson. I wanted to begin my testimony by talking about the educators who shaped and molded me because I know there are DC educators making similar, unforgettable impacts on their students every day. I owe so much to DC for my wonderful educational experience, and I am honored to have an opportunity to support our amazing educators every single day.

I went on to college in New York at Columbia University and to graduate school in California at Berkeley. I taught secondary social studies at Hine Jr. High School between the two. My experience as a teacher was critical in shaping my desire to expand my understanding of education theory and practice. Moreover, as a teacher, I witnessed how social, emotional, familial, and systemic barriers can prevent students from reaching their full potential. I also learned how systems of support, resources, and caring can act as mitigating factors, and I saw how student interest, agency, and connection can drive academic success. These lessons continue to guide my leadership vision.

I am not only sitting before you today because education is in my blood. More than anything, I am here because it is my firm conviction that education can be a great equalizer – it is education that helps young people dream expansive dreams that reach beyond their individual circumstances, and it is education that provides the tools and pathways to see dreams come true. Education is about knowledge of facts and figures, skills, and abilities. It is also about self-awareness, individual agency and life-long learning. To give our students the best chance for a meaningful and fulfilling life, we must provide them excellent educational experiences. I believe my personal experiences well position me to lead OSSE and expand the educational horizons of our students. I am pleased to share more about my professional experience and my vision for moving OSSE forward in the coming years.

Professional Background

I believe that teachers are the true agents of change, and central to my role and the education system writ large is providing teachers the professional training, supports, and instructional materials needed to successfully develop and inspire the next generation of Washingtonians. Supporting great teaching, providing rich educational experiences in schools, and facilitating postsecondary education have been at the core of my work over the course of my career.

After earning my doctorate, I worked as an education researcher for the Urban Institute and as Vice President for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). These experiences grew my research expertise, my knowledge of the education landscape, and my leadership skills. At the Urban Institute, I conducted evaluations of teacher education programs, particularly programs aimed at increasing diversity in the teacher workforce. At NCATE, I helped improve teacher training programs across the country, strengthening content area knowledge and expanding the field experiences of teachers in training. Later, as the Dean of the School of Education at Trinity Washington University, I worked to grow their elementary, special education, and early learning programs and to provide professional development to local teachers. However, it was not until I got to OSSE in 2011 that I truly found a work-home – a place where, working with great colleagues, all my experiences, skills, and talents could be applied toward supporting the education of fellow Washingtonians.

At OSSE, I led the division of postsecondary and career education for 10 years. In this role, I was able to guide OSSE to better support DC learners in myriad ways. From increasing participation in career and technical education programs by more than 90 percent, to tripling dual enrollment seats, to launching the Advanced Technical Center (ATC) and a transformational scholarship program that included tuition, coaching and emergency funds for students, I am very proud of the reach of my work leading this division.

Not only has this work had a profound impact on the education and lives of District residents, their families, and our community, but it also provided me important agency and DC government experience. This leadership experience at OSSE enabled me to step into the Interim State Superintendent role ready to lead on day one.

OSSE Leadership Experience

During my tenure as Interim and Acting State Superintendent, I have provided continuity in leadership while taking important new steps to advance the work of our agency.

Advancing Excellence by Supporting Teaching and Learning

Under my leadership, OSSE has made progress to support teachers and learners through new professional development, standards, programmatic, and technical assistance work.

Advancements include:

- Developing implementation supports for newly introduced standards like financial literacy. I firmly believe that those closest to their students are best positioned to make final curricular choices, but I also believe that we should leverage our agency's expertise to build resources and provide guidance to local education agencies (LEAs). We are proactively taking strides in this direction.
- We have supported elementary school literacy instruction, by creating a structured literacy instructional support tool and a vetted list of structured literacy trainings. These steps, and more, are helping to actualize the vision of the Early Literacy Task Force's 2023 recommendations.
- We also launched the Apprenticeship in Teaching program, which is helping build the next generation of classroom leaders while supporting current educators.

Achieving Equitable Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Over the past 10 months, we have also taken important steps to support students with disabilities:

- In transporting thousands of students door-to-door each day, we have prioritized the acquisition of a new transportation GPS system and increased participation in our parent stipend program.
- We provided required Dyslexia training to more than 14,000 educators this year and published compliance information on our [website](#) for the first time.
- We released OSSE's second annual LEA Special Education Performance Reports, providing a transparent way of identifying LEA strengths and challenges.

Providing Early Learners Vibrant, Quality Early Learning Opportunities

OSSE plays a central role in supporting and sustaining one of the most robust early learning environments in the nation. As an early member of the State Early Childhood Development Coordinating Council, I have a demonstrated commitment to ensuring that our youngest learners have a strong foundation for their education. Under my leadership, we have taken important steps to continue to advance early learning quality, accessibility, and affordability, including:

- Revising the payment formula for the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund program for increased sustainability and increasing early childhood educator credential attainment;
- Streamlining the child care subsidy application process;
- Expanding access to dedicated child care seats for students with disabilities; and
- Joining a new cohort of states working to improve the adoption and implementation of high-quality pre-K curricula.

This is critical and exciting work that I am eager to continue.

Fostering Student Wellbeing

The state education agency also plays an important role in fostering student wellbeing, and I see this as a vital element of student achievement. As Interim Superintendent, I have supported this goal by:

- Successfully launching DC’s first District-wide school climate survey, which will provide valuable insights into how students, parents, and educators feel about what is working in their schools and what needs improvement. These actionable data can help drive school improvement through transparency, coordination, and information sharing.
- We also supported the distribution of \$7 million in grocery benefits to 58,000 students in need of nutritional support through the launch of “Sun-Bucks,” a Summer EBT program.
- In addition, we helped a cross-agency effort to raise the immunization rate of students in the key grades of pre-k 3, kindergarten, 7, and 11 to 96%, the highest number on record.

During my tenure leading OSSE, we have accomplished a great deal, and it would not be possible without the amazingly talented and dedicated government workers who comprise the OSSE team. To cultivate esprit de corps and celebrate the many individuals whose unseen hard work is vital to our agency’s success, we hosted “The OSSEs” earlier this month. This internal awards ceremony celebrated the extraordinary work of employees from across our divisions and highlighted their contributions to our agency’s mission. These nominations embody one of the reasons I love working at and leading OSSE. I am driven by our mission to serve DC’s learners, and I am inspired by the individuals I get to work with each day.

Vision for Future

As I look forward, I am excited to put my experience and knowledge to work as DC’s State Superintendent of Education. OSSE’s current strategic plan runs through 2025, and I look forward to leading the development of OSSE’s next strategic plan to focus and drive our priorities forward with urgency. I am excited to engage you and our many stakeholders as we commence this work this summer. Under my leadership, OSSE’s plan will emphasize academic achievement. A strong DC public education that centered academic achievement is what opened doors of opportunity for me, and it is what will allow our students to lead purpose-driven lives as

well. To achieve upward economic mobility, strong mental and physical health, and a well-rounded, fulfilling life, we must center academic achievement at the heart of all that we do.

My vision for the future is anchored in four cornerstones of academic achievement: attendance, foundational academics, school improvement, and reimagining high school.

Focus on Attendance

First, attendance. We need to get our children to school. Daily attendance is foundational because children do not learn academic standards if they are not in school. For the past two years, our annual attendance report has demonstrated this empirically, with a clear demarcation in growth between students who missed less than five percent of school days and those who missed more than 10 percent of days. And the hard truth is that – even before the pandemic – our children were not attending school enough. If confirmed, I will continue to bring an increased focus on attendance to OSSE.

Foundational Academic Achievement

Second, we must get the basics of education right. This means that we need to continue to drive improvements in foundational academic achievement. All students should be able to read competently by the end of third grade. As a District, we should promise our children and families that we will provide them the supports and tools needed to make this vision a reality, and we must get our students and families to buy in on their end of the bargain. Once children learn to read, they can read to learn; but if we do not reach that point, then academics become an endlessly difficult challenge.

Foundational math is also essential to developing higher-order thinking. OSSE is working to ensure all DC students have access to high quality math instruction from pre-K through high school by setting high standards, providing robust educator supports, and holding schools and school systems accountable. Realizing this District-wide vision in math will require a collective effort. This is why I assembled a task force in October to develop a set of recommendations to enable all DC students to achieve proficiency in math skills and concepts, setting them up for success as critical thinkers and problem-solvers in school and life.

If confirmed, I will double down on continuing to build foundational academic achievement for all students in our system.

Systemically Improving Our Lowest Performing Schools

The third cornerstone of my vision is to improve our lowest performing schools. In 2025, all our children should be attending schools that meet their fundamental educational needs. I am proud of our [*Accelerate DC*](#) framework, which identifies a new evidence-based theory of change to improve our lowest performing schools. At its heart, our plan is to support our lowest performing schools by providing clear expectations, funding, and aligned supports to aid schools in implementing strong improvement plans and close learning gaps. However, written plans are

not enough. To provide all children with the education they deserve, we must actualize school improvement, and we have more work to do to accomplish this goal. If confirmed, I look forward to bringing this vision to fruition.

Reimagine High School

Fourth, and finally, we must continue to reimagine the high school experience to meet the needs of our young people and our workforce. Under Mayor Bowser’s leadership, we have already taken bold steps to enhance the high school experience, including by launching the ATC in Ward 5 and expanding access to dual enrollment, work-based learning, and career and technical education. We must continue to build from this strong foundation. This winter, OSSE unveiled DC’s inaugural District-wide [graduate profile](#), which articulates a vision for the college- and-career-ready capabilities students should attain in advance of high school graduation. OSSE will use the graduate profile to reimagine DC’s graduation requirements and prepare students to succeed in their chosen path. We must continue to create more flexible and personalized learning paths for students that intertwine high school, college, and career. To effectuate this vision, I am committed to an individualized pathway diploma endorsement and to opening a new ATC in Ward 8 this fall focused on healthcare career pathways. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize reimagining the high school experience to make learning more relevant for our students and their futures.

These four cornerstones do not exhaust my ideas for advancing OSSE’s work but are indicative of my leadership vision and how I will seek to use my position and experience to prioritize student learning and achievement. There are very real operational and external challenges that our agency will continue to face, including improving our student transportation service and navigating a constrained budgetary environment and uncertainty at the federal level. During my 13 years with OSSE, I have always faced challenges head on, and with the support of the terrific team at OSSE and our government and non-governmental partners, I will continue to rise to any challenge that may come OSSE’s way. In so doing, I will always have one lodestar: do what is best for our kids. I am optimistic that everyone here shares that guiding vision with me.

Conclusion

I will conclude by sharing a quote from the beginning of one of my favorite books, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston: “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they stay forever on the horizon, never out of sight...”

My wish for every student in DC is an excellent education, an education that challenges every student to meet their greatest potential. More than ever before, we have an opportunity to improve the educational outcomes for all students, to close the attainment gaps, and to increase upward mobility for DC families. With sustained effort, no matter the head winds, wishes far away on the horizon come closer to shore each day.

We must be ambitious enough to dream of a future yet unseen and practical enough to do what we can to bend the arc of destiny for the coming generation. If confirmed, I will keep my eye forever on the horizon so that our community's children can dream new dreams and have the tools to pursue them unyieldingly.

My path to sitting before you today started with learning to read and do mathematics at Bancroft Elementary, which ultimately led me study education at one of our nation's foremost universities, draft education policies at a DC think tank, work in higher education, and lead OSSE's division of postsecondary and career education. I have been on a continuous journey that has always had what is best for students as the clarion call. Through these experiences, I have grown my understanding of education theory and practice, my knowledge of DC government, and my leadership skills. The State Superintendent seat is the culmination of my life's work. I am ready to lead OSSE into the future, and it would be the greatest honor of my professional life. I hope you will give me the opportunity to do so. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.