



**Testimony of  
Dr. Amy Maisterra  
Interim State Superintendent of Education**

**Public Hearing on the  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education's  
Fiscal Year 2014 Performance**

**Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on Education  
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairman**

**March 6, 2015  
Hearing Room 120  
John A. Wilson Building**

Good Morning Chairman Grosso and members and staff of the Education Committee. My name is Amy Maisterra, and I serve as the Interim State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia. I look forward to supporting the success of Ms. Hanseul Kang, our new State Superintendent, whose tenure will begin on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I am pleased to testify before you today on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE's) Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Performance.

OSSE's mission is to remove barriers and create pathways for District residents so that they can receive a high quality education that prepares them for success in college, careers, and life.

FY14 was a productive year for OSSE, during which we built upon our efforts in FY13. Our continued progress is the result of the hard work of OSSE's staff, in collaboration with the State Board of Education and our partners at the District of Columbia Public Schools and the Public Charter School Board, as well as leaders and staff in our District's Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). While we acknowledge these accomplishments, we also recognize that our work is far from complete. We continue to move forward with great urgency to build upon what is working and to fix what isn't.

I want to start by highlighting some of our greatest milestones of FY 14 and then discuss areas where we are seeing continued improvement. I will close by addressing what we are currently doing to position our agency, and the city's residents, for future success.

## **EXIT FROM FEDERAL GRANT HIGH RISK STATUS**

First, on June 19, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education removed us from its list of "high-risk grantees". This removal came after eight years of being considered "high-risk" due to systemic problems identified through longstanding audit findings on the District's grants. Since the inception of OSSE, our team has worked diligently to address these findings, implementing corrective actions to our

financial, record-keeping, and internal control systems to ensure successful federal grants management.

In addition to the removal from high-risk status, OSSE has seen a significant reduction in A-133 audit findings. During FY 14, the agency received a total of six audit findings – down from the 16 audit findings received during FY13. In FY15, we continue to work toward elimination of findings, and we believe that additional measures that we have put in place, such as implementing an Enterprise Grants Management System (EGMS) and moving to a more targeted, risk-based monitoring approach for our grantees, will help accomplish this goal.

### **DISMISSAL FROM THE BLACKMAN-JONES CONSENT DECREE**

On December 18, 2014, after 17 years of federal judicial oversight, the District was released from the remaining portion of the Blackman-Jones litigation (Jones et. al. v. District of Columbia), a class-action lawsuit in which the District was found to be at fault for failing to meet its obligations related to special education due process hearings and timely implementation of Hearing Officer Decisions and Settlement Agreements.

In late 2011, on the basis of improved performance, a federal court released the District from oversight of the Blackman portion of the Blackman-Jones consent decree. In 2012, a federal court released the District from oversight in a 1995 class-action suit, Petties v. DC, which related to making prompt payments to private schools and getting students with disabilities transported to school on time.

This most recent milestone, exit from Jones, underscores not only the fact that the District was able to meet the requirements for exit, but also that the Court has confidence in the District's ability to sustain a durable system of special education in the city. Other key metrics demonstrate that we have made significant progress and are on track for continued success:

- The District has significantly increased funding for special education through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) and worked to build capacity throughout both sectors to serve students with disabilities in

the community. As a result, the city has reduced the number of students educated in nonpublic settings significantly.

- Standardized reading scores for the District's fourth-grade students with disabilities improved by 6 percentage points between 2011 and 2013 – even as average scores declined by 2 points at the national level. Students' math scores improved by 11 points over the same period, while remaining flat nationally.
- For the District's eighth-graders with disabilities, standardized reading scores improved by 8 percentage points between 2011 and 2013, while advancing by just 1 point nationally. Math scores for these students improved by 9 points over the same period, even though the national average fell by one point.
- The District's on-time rate for special education evaluations was 67 percent in 2008-2009. It is now currently trending at over 90 percent.
- The District has seen a 70 percent reduction in formal complaints by families with children in special education.

It is clear that we are moving in the right direction. I now want to turn to additional areas where OSSE made significant progress in FY 14:

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENTERPRISE GRANTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

EGMS is a web-based system designed to improve OSSE's management and administration of the District of Columbia's federal and local grants. EGMS was established to reduce burden and provide users with real-time information on the status of their Federal and local funds. External users, grant applicants and sub-recipients (such as LEAs and CBOs), can access EGMS from any computer with internet connection. This gives external users the ability to apply for grants, check the status of grants, electronically submit requests for reimbursements, and check the status of reimbursements at any time, day or night. In addition, EGMS gives sub-recipients the ability to check the amount of money awarded for each grant bestowed to their organization, the amount of money requested and paid to date for

each grant, and the balance of each grant. This instant access supports the ability of grant recipients to track their grant awards to ensure they do not lapse any funds.

OSSE staff also benefit from the launch of EGMS. Internal users are able to review grants and reimbursement requests just as easily. In addition, OSSE staff receive immediate email notification of required actions, such as application or reimbursement approval. Last, grant managers can also review grant dashboards to proactively trouble shoot challenges on behalf of a school or provider.

OSSE acknowledges that while EGMS is a major improvement to the management and administration of the grants, the initial roll out of EGMS has not been perfect. Both external users and internal users have experienced various challenges that are typical with first-year implementation. OSSE is working to address the challenges presented thus far by implementing necessary technological upgrades to the system; sending LEAs monthly grant snapshots, which provide each LEA with an update on their grant allocations from OSSE; and ensuring we have the internal capacity to build EGMS and use the system to monitor our work flow wisely, so that timely and effective grants management can be guaranteed for all grant recipients.

## **LAUNCH OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD QUALITY IMPROVEMENT NETWORK**

Since 2008 and the passage of the “Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008,” the District has led the nation in providing all of our three and four-year olds with access to full-day free Pre-K. Currently, over 70% of the District’s three-year olds and 99% of the District’s four-year olds are enrolled in one of the District’s pre-K programs. Yet, given that much of a child’s brain development occurs by the time he or she is three years old, it is imperative that we begin at birth, and not wait until children enter pre-K, to provide high-quality services to our District’s youngest residents. This past year OSSE made significant strides in serving infants and toddlers with disabilities. Through the expansion of eligibility criteria for early intervention services in FY14, OSSE has been able to cast a much wider net to ensure a strong start for families whose children qualify for services.

Currently, 3,725 children ages 0-3 receive child care subsidy in the District of Columbia, and of those children, 39% represent families with no income, 72% represent families whose incomes are under 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and 80% represent families whose incomes are under 130% of the FPL. All children need comprehensive services and a continuity of care to ensure that they are poised to succeed when they enter pre-K and Kindergarten.

To address the needs of this population and their families, in August of 2014, OSSE applied for, and was awarded, a five year, approximately five million dollar Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start. The project, entitled the Early Learning Quality Improvement Network (QIN) is anchored in a partnership with three high quality, neighborhood-based child development programs that serve as hubs to child development centers and homes.

These three hubs will provide up to 14 partner centers and 12 homes with job embedded professional development, coaching, family support services, teacher incentives, and technical assistance to ensure children and families receive comprehensive services, including mental health consultation, family engagement and support, health and nutrition, and early intervention services. This federal grant will supplement the \$1.8 million OSSE has dedicated to support the QIN's comprehensive services model. We hope you can join us at the QIN launch later this month with the Mayor.

Over the next five years, OSSE will use the QIN to transform early learning in the District by helping child development centers and homes align to the comprehensive quality standards of Early Head Start, reaching at least the 3,300 children who are eligible for subsidy; invest in adding 1,000 new high quality slots for children and families; improve inter-agency coordination and collaboration to support young children and their families; and ensure that children with high needs have access to these high quality child care slots in their community.

Throughout FY15, in coordination with the State Early Childhood Development Coordinating Council (SECDCC), OSSE will continue to work to ensure all of our

youngest children receive access to high-quality early learning. Through the QIN, both children and families will benefit from early, continuous, and comprehensive child development and family support services in a manner that continues to put the District at the forefront of the early learning movement throughout the country.

## **OPENING OF THE DISTRICT'S YOUTH REENGAGEMENT CENTER**

Currently, there are approximately 7,500 youth (ages 16 through 24) who reside in the District of Columbia who are not enrolled in school or other educational programs and who do not have a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential. Over 40% of these youth live in Wards 7 and 8; nearly 60 percent are male, and 86 percent are African-American.

As we continue our efforts to ensure that all students within the District's pre-K-12 system receive a quality education, it is critical that students who have disengaged also have a solid on-ramp to reconnect to education options that will prepare them for success. In response to this need, OSSE led the effort to open a ReEngagement Center this past October. The Center serves as a "single-door" through which disengaged youth can reconnect to educational options and other critical services to support their attainment of a high school diploma, GED, higher education, or a career.

In alignment with nationwide best practices, the Reengagement Center's core activities include:

- Conducting targeted outreach to a defined list of dropouts, as well as engaging walk-ins and referrals;
- Assessing academic status and non-academic needs of youth to help develop individualized education plans;
- Identifying "best-fit" educational options;
- Supporting the re-enrollment process; and
- Providing ongoing support for at least one year once re-enrolled.

OSSE has received strong support in this effort from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Department of Employment Services, Raise DC's

Disconnected Youth Change Network, other key partner agencies, schools, and community-based organizations, and we look forward to making DC a national model in this work.

## **SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT OF SLED**

The Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLED) is a comprehensive repository of student and education-related data. Initiated in 2012, SLED makes educational data available to schools and key education partners in the District of Columbia which enables planning, reporting and trend analysis, program evaluation, and increased transparency for consumers. I want to share some highlights of some of the exciting work we are doing related to SLED in FY 14 and FY 15 to date:

- Shortly after SLED's inception, OSSE created a system to assign unique student identifiers (or USIs) for every child enrolled in school, so that we could support schools with education planning and evaluate the impact of interventions and supports over time. In FY 14, this system was expanded to include USI assignments for children in Part C early intervention, Pre-K programs, and adult education.
- SLED information is now used to inform which students qualify for the One Card transit subsidy.
- SLED data is now also used to inform not only our LearnDC school profiles, but the MySchool DC application system.
- Moreover, we are excited to share that we have made significant progress on our data-sharing efforts with sister agencies. These agreements, expanded in FY14 and FY15 to include DOH, DYRS, DBH, and DHS, allow for cross-agency planning, education record sharing, and coordinated eligibility determinations and service delivery.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTNERSHIP FOR ASSESSMENT OF READINESS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS**

The District of Columbia was on the forefront of ensuring that our children are ready for college, careers and life through being one of the first jurisdictions to adopt common core standards in 2010. We also serve as one of the governing states to support the development of a new, common core-aligned, computer-based assessment, known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC. As you know, DC LEAs have started administering the PARCC assessment this week.

OSSE has provided a series of supports to assist schools with getting ready for PARCC. After administering a field test in spring of 2014, OSSE launched a series of trainings and webinars in the summer of 2014, both through sessions at OSSE and presentations at external meetings, such as the FOCUS data conference, Achievement Network's summer conference, and Fight for Children's Common Core implementation conference. These sessions continue to the present.

In July 2014, OSSE initiated monthly meetings for LEA assessment coordinators on assessment administration readiness. OSSE also offered a PARCC technology gap assessment to all LEAs.

On January 23, 2015, OSSE hosted a day-long LEA Institute, "It Takes a City to Knock it Out of the PARCC," open to all school staff. At the Institute, LEAs were matched with an OSSE staff member to be their dedicated "Next Generation Assessment (NGA) Ambassador" for questions about the PARCC and other DC assessments. This NGA Ambassador model has worked well- staff have tracked questions and responses and used a common tool for identifying frequently asked questions and posting answers through our LEA Look Forward, our weekly communication.

Additional support for schools have included weekly guidance and procedural updates for each LEA's test coordinator, specific webinars for special education coordinators and teachers, and the establishment of three escalation pathways during testing:

- A test integrity hotline, staffed by the OSSE assessment team, for LEAs to immediately report issues related to test security;
- A PARCC administration hotline provided by the test vendor for immediate troubleshooting of technology challenges; and
- An OSSE-staffed escalation path to the test vendor to support for tricky issues within the test platform, to ensure a timely response.

With these supports in place, and with the great preparation of our LEAs, we believe DC has built a very solid foundation upon which to administer this year's assessments.

### **CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT OF OSSE'S DIVISION OF TRANSPORTATION (OSSE-DOT)**

The mission of OSSE's student transportation division is to provide safe, reliable, efficient transportation services that positively support learning opportunities for eligible District students. Currently, OSSE-DOT serves 3,148 students. Of these, 2,866 were transported to 225 schools, along 549 bus routes, in 766 vehicles, traveling a cumulative of 27,727 miles per day. Additionally, 249 students participated in the Metro fare card program, 4 students participated in the reimbursement program and 29 students use the services of our transportation contractor.

During this school year, OSSE-DOT has continued to pursue a standard of excellence and has maintained a 96.2% success rate of student riders arriving daily to school before the bell rings. Additionally, we have begun to track student on-time arrival at home in the afternoon and on-time first student pick-up in the morning. Although not common metrics in the transportation industry, we know both pieces of information will better inform OSSE-DOT's routes and ensure that we are providing the best service possible to District students.

Furthermore, in response to issues with an antiquated Complaints/Investigations database, DOT created a new Audit and Compliance database prior to SY 2014-2015. The Audit and Compliance Tool (ACT) is used by the Parent Resource Center to log, track, and resolve complaints and document investigations. ACT is

also used to track behavioral incidents. The database is configured for robust reporting and data analysis in order to improve resolution times and responses. ACT is more user-friendly and tracks additional information than what was captured through the previous system.

In FY15, to further improve the special education transportation system, DOT is implementing an Automated Event Notification Service for the parent and stakeholder community that provides real-time information on bus delays, route changes, service updates, school bus incidents or accidents, inclement weather-related alerts, operating status notifications, and general announcements regarding student transportation services via voice call, text message, and/or email.

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: A FOCUS ON OUTCOMES**

As the State Education Agency for DC, OSSE is positioned to support the administration in ensuring that we are using data to build on what is working, so that we can leverage our successes and be smart about our investments. There are several education plans that we must submit to the U.S. Department of Education that help focus and guide our efforts here in DC, and OSSE, in collaboration with our partners, is investing significant time in ensuring that we get these plans right. I am going to take a moment to touch on two of these plans now.

### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act Waiver**

In FY14, OSSE sought and obtained an extension of the District's Waiver to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Originally approved in July 2012, the District's Waiver puts forth the state's comprehensive effort to ensure school quality. The Waiver is anchored in rigorous state standards and assessments; a system of differentiated recognition, accountability and support; an analysis of ways to ensure equitable access to effective teachers; and a reduction of administration burden. OSSE is currently in the process of seeking a renewal for the next three years, through SY 2017-2018. OSSE has worked extensively with community stakeholders, local education agencies, and the State Board of Education to prepare the application for renewal. On February 11, 2015, OSSE released a draft version of the application for renewal for a 30 day public comment

period closing March 13, 2015. We encourage stakeholders to review the proposal, submit comments, and contact us with questions.

### **State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)**

As second plan that we are developing is a six year strategic plan for improving outcomes for students with disabilities in DC. Nationally, there is recognition that while procedural compliance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is important, it is not enough- we need to build high quality programs that ensure that our students with disabilities are fully prepared for college, career, and life. To spur a shift in focus with states, the Department of Education is requiring states to identify one priority area and develop a focused, comprehensive State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). OSSE has proposed that DC's focus be on graduation, and has begun an extensive effort to engage stakeholders in analyzing our data and considering coherent improvement strategies that will help us move the needle for our students. In developing these important plans for the education of all students in the District, OSSE will continue to use multiple means of communication and engagement to maximize feedback and input from stakeholders at all levels.

Also, as strong as any plans may be, we know they are only as good as the quality of their execution. As we support our LEAs in improving outcomes, we will need to continue to monitor the impact of our plans and be able to make mid-course corrections. With the advent of SLED and EGMS, we have a wealth of data that can be regularly and proactively reviewed to assess the "health" of our LEAs and schools, data which can be used to target support and inform the frequency and intensity of monitoring as well as decisions about competitive grant making. Using a strong risk-based approach to monitoring, we can allow successful LEAs to continue doing what works, while targeting limited resources to where the data says they are most needed.

### **CLOSING**

In closing, OSSE will continue to work diligently to ensure sustained progress and continue our momentum in the District's education reforms. While our efforts thus far have supported improved compliance and increased academic success for our

students, increased confidence in the District's educational system, and improved transparency for our stakeholders, we still have much to do to ensure that we are serving our constituents well and all children, youth, and adults are receiving high quality services.

I would like to thank OSSE's tremendously hardworking and dedicated staff. On behalf of all of the OSSE team, I thank you, Chairman Grosso and the Council, for your continued support. I am happy to answer any questions you and the Committee may have for me.