



Analysis of Attendance and Graduation Outcomes at Public High Schools in the District of Columbia

January 16, 2017



Background and Scope

- Dec. 1, 2017: Mayor directed OSSE to conduct an independent analysis of student-level attendance and graduation outcomes at public high schools in the District of Columbia.
- OSSE used three methods to complete its review:
 1. Citywide Attendance and Graduation Analysis: analysis of all public high schools, conducted by OSSE staff
 2. PCSB Oversight Review: review of PCSB's oversight procedures for public charter high schools, conducted by OSSE staff
 3. DCPS review: An investigation of DCPS, including Ballou High School, conducted by outside firm, Alvarez & Marsal.

Complete interim report, focused on Ballou, delivered Jan. 12; final report on all DCPS high schools will be delivered by end of January.
- Urgency in timeline, to best make changes that would positively impact currently enrolled students and their educational outcomes.



Citywide Attendance and Graduation Analysis:

- Over the past three years, absenteeism among seniors has been rising, and more students with high absenteeism have been graduating over that period.
- Students are still much more likely to graduate if they have better attendance.
- Patterns vary significantly by school type:
 - Charter schools and DCPS selective high schools have lower levels of absenteeism, and lower levels of graduates with high absenteeism.
 - DCPS neighborhood schools have very high rates of absenteeism, and an increasing number of students with extreme absenteeism have graduated in recent years.
- Patterns of attendance and graduation not same at every DCPS neighborhood high school; a closer look could show differences in practice at the school level.

PCSB Oversight Analysis:

- PCSB generally complies with its own policy to review and certify graduates.
- PCSB current policies and procedures do not currently include a review of student attendance data or credit recovery policies.



Alvarez & Marsal Report: Ballou

Alvarez & Marsal's investigation into the implementation of DCPS's policies for attendance and graduation at Ballou resulted in several findings, including:

- A pattern of graduating students with extreme numbers of course absences, in contradiction with DCPS policy;
- Incorrect or contradictory guidance from school officials on coding of absences;
- Implementation of grading policies not in compliance with DCPS policy;
- Inappropriate or excessive use of credit recovery for students, including implementation inconsistent with DCPS's stated policies;
- Pressure from administrators on teachers to provide opportunities to pass; and
- Inadequate training, tools and supports to enable effective implementation of DCPS systems, policies and procedures.




Alvarez & Marsal Report: Ballou


- Policy violations were seen in a total of 113 of 177 graduating students' records from Ballou High School
- Excessive Absences:
 - Many teachers did not apply the grade reduction required for excessive absences in regular courses.
 - Many students also earned credit through credit recovery despite excessive absences.
- Grading Policy Adherence
 - Administrators provided guidance that contradicted the grading policy, requiring a grading “floor” of 50 percent.
 - Significant gaps in training and support for teachers using the grading system.
- Credit Recovery:
 - 83 of 177 graduates participated in some form of credit recovery in SY16-17.
 - Many students were enrolled in credit recovery in contradiction to DCPS policy.
 - Credit recovery policies were found to be vague and undefined, with little oversight, coordination or training.
- Pressure for Passing Grades:
 - Administrators communicated high passing percentage expectations to teachers, and encouraged teachers to find way to pass students regardless of absences.
 - Teachers reported concerns of effect on performance evaluations.




Summary

- OSSE used three methods to complete its review:

1. Citywide Attendance and Graduation Analysis: analysis of all public high schools, conducted by OSSE staff  Complete

2. PCSB Oversight Review: review of PCSB's oversight procedures for public charter high schools, conducted by OSSE staff  Complete

3. DCPS review: An investigation of DCPS, including Ballou High School, conducted by outside firm, Alvarez & Marsal.  Interim report on Ballou complete

Final report on all DCPS high schools to be delivered by end of month