

A 21st Century Education System: Accountability and Support for All

“Finally, to those who question whether this city can ever boast a world-class school system, I join my former colleagues on the Council in saying that this Government will settle for nothing less.”

Mayor Adrian Fenty, January 3, 2007

**State Board of Education
Public Hearing
December 3, 2008**



Introduction

We have today a unique opportunity to reform our education system in the District of Columbia. The District is committed to developing a world-class school system and is focused more than ever before on this effort. It is critical then that we have a shared District-wide vision for this education reform, ensuring that the urgent work being undertaken now will result in a comprehensive system capable of providing all District students with a high-quality education.

This document represents the beginning steps towards a framework that would be used to develop and build upon that shared vision. This shared vision, a work in progress, can be our educational “North Star”, serving as a roadmap which ultimately will lead the District towards the world-class education system we all desire.

Clearly, the current five-year strategic plans of the State, DCPS, and individual charter schools are important to our education reform agenda. In addition, a long term view over the next fifteen to twenty years, built upon a review of best practices from across the world, the country, and our own community, will ensure that all of our reform efforts in the District will lead to an education system which produces students capable of competing in the 21st century creative economy as successful community members and world citizens.

A Call to Innovate

- Multiple stakeholders, including education leaders, business community leaders, educators, parents, and advocates, are critical partners as we boldly transform the District's education system.
- Creating this long-term shared vision will take a multi-agency, multi-year, and community-wide approach and will rely on an ongoing commitment to mutual accountability and transparency.
- This is a call to action intended as the beginning steps to a larger and more detailed dialogue on how to re-architect our education system in the District.

The State's Role

- The State will play a direct delivery role in implementing certain components of the vision and an indirect policy-setting role for other components. As a whole, however, the proposed vision will require the partnership of the many stakeholders in the District. The State views education as a lifelong endeavor, with a pre-K through 16 (college equivalency plus continuing education) responsibility to all District residents, and is committed to serving all students at all levels.

The Need for Innovation

There is an urgent and ongoing crisis in our education system today:

- Locally, in the most recent DC-CAS results for the elementary and secondary school literacy and mathematics assessments, only 40-50% of District students were proficient or above.
- Nationally, by all quantitative metrics, DC schools continue to be one of the lowest performing urban districts, underperforming similar urban districts in the United States. For example, the DC school system was one of the two lowest performing districts on the 2007 Grade 4 Reading and Grade 8 Mathematics NAEP assessments.
- Internationally, the United States significantly underperforms the vast majority of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, and we are falling further every year.

But what should this mean to us?

It is not news to our residents that the District's schools are not performing well. But when this information is taken in the national and international context, the take-away message must be that we cannot simply reform what we are doing – it will not be enough to just improve the education system that we have. Instead, we must comprehensively re-think the District's education system.

A Unique Opportunity to Improve Student Achievement

Fortunately, we now have a unique opportunity to improve our education system here in the District, due to a number of factors:

- There is a shared sense of urgency in the District to improve its schools;
- Our broad city leadership is focused on education reform;
- There are clear lines of accountability;
- We have a close-knit city-state relationship that enables a focused use of resources;
- The District has a relatively small system of schools, making it more receptive to reform; and
- There is a strong support infrastructure within the District, with its numerous universities and colleges, partnership opportunities with community-based organizations, renowned national organizations and resources located and readily accessible here in the District, and an engaged community of education leaders, teachers, and families.

*The Core Principles:
A System of High Quality Schools*

The Core Principles

1. Every District of Columbia student will have high quality educators accountable for improving student performance.
2. All students will graduate from District of Columbia schools prepared to succeed in a 21st century creative economy as positive, productive, and informed citizens of our community and the world.
3. All individuals at all levels – from early childhood through adulthood – in the District of Columbia education system will have access to quality education options.
4. Families and the community are essential partners, and strong engagement is a priority in ensuring quality education for all.
5. The District of Columbia education system will be supported by cycles of continuous improvement.

1. Every District of Columbia student will have high quality educators accountable for improving student performance.

At the core of student learning is the quality of the daily interaction between education leaders, teachers, and students, at every age, in every educational setting. This interaction will be engaging, inspiring, rigorous, and relevant, resulting in student progress based on real understanding and enthusiasm for learning.

What might it look like?

- A robust system of support and accountability with high expectations for all educators that begins with preparation programs and includes licensure, induction, mentoring, and comprehensive performance improvement and evaluation;
- Quality professional development for every educator that is founded upon an active community of education leaders and teachers who share and examine model teaching; research on local, national, and international best practices; innovative lesson plans; student performance data; and more;
- An expanded network of educator preparation and development providers that includes universities, colleges, non-profit organizations, peer-educators, and others; and
- Multiple opportunities for career growth and expansion of responsibilities for education leaders and teachers, which will encourage performance improvement and a personal investment in the education system, leading to greater retention of high-performing educators in the District.

2. All students will graduate from D.C. schools prepared to succeed in a 21st century creative economy as positive, productive, and informed citizens of our community and the world.

This preparation will include core competencies as well as creativity and innovation skills, global and economic awareness, critical thinking, effective use of technology, communication and collaboration skills, and second language mastery.

What might it look like?

- Students at every level of the education continuum (from early childhood to adulthood) master core competencies that reflect international benchmarks;
- Education systems are structured to ensure that students are proficient at core competencies and 21st century skills as they progress through the system;
- Enhanced means for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills, including standardized assessments and the application of knowledge through performance-based measures;
- An additional emphasis on and resources allocated to technology tools and infrastructure; and
- A comprehensive system of interventions that are immediately accessible for students who need assistance.

3. All individuals at all levels – from early childhood through adulthood – in the D.C. education system will have access to quality education options.

This portfolio of learning opportunities will encompass multiple high-quality options at all levels and in a variety of formats, and these opportunities will be accessible for every District resident through a transparent, easily navigable system.

What might it look like?

- A significant investment in early learning programs to ensure high-quality services for infants, toddlers, and pre-kindergarten children;
- A strong and meaningful elementary school foundation in literacy and mathematics, enabling our children to read at or beyond grade level and to possess a deep understanding of mathematics principles starting at an early age, a foundation that is enriched by social studies, science, music and art instruction;
- A structure for secondary school education with a wide array of rigorous options, including dual enrollment in high school and college, career and technical education, and other pathways;
- At every level of the education system, educators work together and with students to build learning communities that are based on respect, trust, and shared values, leading to the development of a continuum of positive behavior support for all students in every educational setting; and
- Educational experiences for all students are engaging and relevant; including opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and project-based instruction; that are not necessarily bound in space and time to schools or classrooms but instead may be virtual or community-based; and that take advantage of the rich resources in the District of Columbia.

4. Families and the community are essential partners, and strong engagement is a priority in ensuring quality education for all.

A truly successful education system in the District will have families and the community sharing with school leaders and educators a commitment to and investment in ensuring that every District resident receives a quality education.

What might it look like?

- Enhanced family and community engagement that welcomes families in every educational setting and creates meaningful, informed opportunities for involvement and partnership;
- Access to comprehensive information about all of the District's learning opportunities to families and the community, with multiple forms of communication, ensuring that families are able to make informed choices for their students;
- Families and communities that have embraced a culture of excellence for their children's education, incorporating a strong family value of education that reaches beyond the school day into all activities before and after school and in the home;
- An engaged community (including faith and community based organizations, business leaders, civic leaders, after-school programs, and more) that deeply values the education of its residents and engages in productive ways to ensure that every resident knows what an excellent education looks like and expects nothing other than the best for its students; and
- Students take responsibility for their education and have the support of their family, teachers, counselors, mentors, and others for their continued progress and their individual education plans.

5. The D.C. education system will be supported by cycles of continuous improvement.

All employees and education providers that support learning are held accountable for their performance and are motivated to seek meaningful opportunities for improvement. This constant focus on growth and successful practice is the hallmark of an education system that is itself an active learning community.

What might it look like?

- Empowered education leaders and school teams with both autonomy over resource allocation and instructional decision-making and accountability for results, promoting a culture of excellence in the District's education system;
- Targeted resources supporting education innovation and effective improvement models;
- Data-driven methods of identifying high-performing educators and schools, with incentives provided to reward and expand continuous progress and improvement; and
- Monitoring and evaluation systems at the state, school district, education provider, and program level, covering quality, operations, and compliance.

The Road Ahead

Creating Space for Dialogue and Development

- This initial vision framework will continue to be refined and informed by stakeholder input and participation.
- Opportunities for stakeholder involvement could include:
 - Public hearings and discussions with the State Board of Education;
 - Posting of the narrative and presentation for public feedback;
 - Working group sessions focusing on each core principle;
 - Roundtables with Higher Education leaders;
 - Partnerships with Business Community leaders;
 - Discussions and feedback from student groups; and
 - Ongoing collaboration with families, educators, and education leaders.

References and Resources

- National Center on Education and the Economy
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills
- American Diploma Project, Achieve
- Education Commission for the States
- Center on Innovation and Improvement
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- “Creating a World-Class Education System in Ohio”
- “How the World’s Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top”, McKinsey & Company
- National Center for Education Statistics
- NAEP 2007 Scores
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, PISA 2003 Results
- Examples from other states, including Delaware and Ohio
- Examples from abroad including: Singapore, Finland, England, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, and Japan