



**Testimony of
Darren Woodruff, Board Chair
DC Public Charter School Board**

**DC PCSB Oversight Hearing
Committee on Education
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Good morning Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee. My name is Darren Woodruff and I am the Chairman of the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB). I am joined today by our Executive Director Scott Pearson as well as the Deputy Director Naomi DeVeaux. I'd like to talk about the work we are doing with our public charter schools to improve our city's public education.

As our city grows, it is important that we provide families and communities with information that helps them navigate DC's vibrant and diverse choices. By working together with various stakeholders, our goal is to increase the quality of our schools, support our educators, and ensure more families are able attend a school that is the best fit for their student.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of public charter schools in the District and they have become essential to our public school landscape. We currently provide oversight to 65 local education agencies which operate 118 citywide schools. Each year, we see more families choosing public charter schools and, importantly, more students than ever are attending Tier 1 schools thanks to our unrelenting focus on school quality.

This year, more than 41,000 students attend a public charter school. And it is important to emphasize, public charter schools educate a student population that is equally or at times more economically disadvantaged than the city average while outperforming the city averages in PARCC performance and graduating more students.

This year we were pleased by our schools' progress and achievement. As you know DC students take the PARCC test, an assessment given in eight other states. PARCC shared data comparing charter students' performance against the other PARCC students. We found that DC public charter students outperformed the PARCC average in nearly every subgroup.

And these results keep improving citywide, with a 4-percentage point increase in English and a 2-percentage point increase in the Math assessment compared to last year's results.

Diving deeper into those results, we are beginning to make real progress on closing the achievement gap with African American and Latino students improving faster than the city average.

As council knows, students cannot be properly educated if they are not in their seats and fully engaged in the classroom. That is why we are dedicated to improving discipline rates and increasing attendance. I am proud to say that our efforts are yielding positive results. We continue to see suspension and expulsion rates decline thanks to data transparency and leadership by our dedicated LEAs. Last year, we saw the total number of expulsions fall to just 81, or 0.21% of all students, below the national average, down from 395 students less than a decade ago. On suspensions, a similar story is borne out. Between 2013 and last year, the suspension rate at public charter schools has dropped more than 40%. Many have been able to achieve these gains by holding a magnifying glass up to their practices, employing restorative justice techniques and sharing best practices. This is a testament to the priority placed on the issue by DC PCSB, this committee, and the LEA leaders.

Meanwhile, thanks to our improved fiscal oversight and your support, Mr. Chairman, public charter schools are healthier financially and their contracts are more closely scrutinized.

So, to summarize, our enrollment, academic quality, in-seat attendance, fiscal health and the number of students attending Tier one schools are all up, suspensions and expulsions are down. Public charter schools continue to achieve better results with a less advantaged population and their successes are benefitting the city as more and more families choose to raise children in our district.

Of course, as charter schools have grown, they are no longer a sideshow in the city. We, and the LEA leaders, realize that we need to engage across the city, with local communities and government agencies, civic associations and with our education partners. We recognize this responsibility and act on it, in ways large and small.

For example, we've made a big effort to improve our communications with ANC's. We have reached out and met with dozens of ANC commissioners. We simplified our ANC notification process and now allow ANCs to comment either in-person or in writing on such matters as school location or student enrollment increases.

This year we worked with the DME, OSSE, DCPS and others throughout government on more than 40 task forces and working groups to improve various school related issues. Among the most important is the cross-sector task force, which Mr. Pearson and I both serve on. We have really tried to "lean in" with this task force, producing after its first year a substantial set of recommendations around mid-year transfers. I expect our second year to be more productive, tackling such issues as coordinating processes for school opening and closing, school safety, and better serving our at-risk students. We are committed to strengthen education for all students by ensuring greater equity between sectors.

The two watchwords at the Public Charter School Board are quality and choice. We know that to ensure a quality choice for District families we must hold our schools accountable to the highest standards, and we strive to do just that. We welcome the oversight of this committee and of all citizens of the district. We are committed to transparency, and to making data about our schools, and about our own operations, accessible to the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to address any questions that you may have. Thank you.