



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

**Testimony of
Skip McKoy, Board Chair
DC Public Charter School Board**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

**PCSB Oversight Hearing
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairman**

February 18, 2015

Good afternoon Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee. My name is Skip McKoy, and I am the Board Chair of the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB). I am joined today by Scott Pearson, our Executive Director, and Naomi Deveaux, our Deputy Director. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

We are here to talk about PCSB's performance over the past year, and the role we have played in increasing *quality* and *choice* for DC students and families. As public education in the District continues to improve, public charter schools are leading the way and bringing families back to DC.

Our goal at PCSB is to ensure that students and families in Washington, DC have access to quality, public charter school education. We currently oversee 61 charter school organizations across 112 campuses, serving more than 37,000 students from every ward in the city.

Each of these charter school organizations offers unique educational choices for students and families. That is because they are given a great deal of flexibility and freedom in their operations to best meet the needs of their individual student populations. We appreciate the Council's efforts to respect this flexibility in the past, and we look forward to the continued support.

We are proud to report that the percentage of public charter school students who score proficient or advanced, as measured by the DC CAS, has continued to grow each of the past eight years, and exceed the citywide proficiency rates. Perhaps more importantly, this mastery of English and Math is occurring across demographic groups, including African American, economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities. It's also important to note that public charter schools serve a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students and similar numbers of special education students as the city average.

That last point is important; as there is often a misconception that public charter schools succeed by somehow “skimming” and serving a more advantaged population than traditional public schools. In DC, this simply is not true. PCSB takes seriously the responsibility of public charter schools to serve *all* students. That's why we have an entire team, our Equity and Fidelity team, focused

on ensuring that public charter schools are living up to their responsibilities as public schools.

To that end, nearly three years ago, we launched an initiative on the use of discipline and suspensions. Rather than using mandates or requirements, we focused instead on transparency and information sharing. The results have been promising, with expulsions down more than half since 2012 and suspensions down by nearly a fifth in the last year alone.

This initiative is illustrative of our approach to charter school oversight. We minimize mandates and maximize incentives, we rely on data and transparency, and we engage schools and their boards to help schools improve their performance without inhibiting the flexibility they need to serve the unique needs of their students.

This approach to oversight and authorizing has been recognized nationally. Without a doubt, the primary credit for improving performance in public charter schools goes to the school leaders and teachers who work so hard on behalf of their children, but we also

know that the quality of the authorizer matters as well. That's why we are proud that in the past year, national organizations such as the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools have recognized DC as the strongest charter sector in the nation, and PCSB as a leading authorizer.

This past year offered two illustrative examples of how this oversight can pay off. Last fall, IDEA Public Charter School, which was previously under probationary status by the Mayor for low academic performance, was able to improve so much that the school not only left probation, but did so a year early. Another school, Center City Public Charter School—Congress Heights campus, is the first school in our Performance Management Framework ratings, the PMF, to move from the lowest tier, Tier 3, to the highest, Tier 1. These schools are shining examples of what can happen when hard work meets effective oversight to serve the needs of students. We

look forward to bringing you more examples of this improvement in the future.

Across the city, the number of children able to attend quality public charter schools is increasing. However, it may surprise some to learn that this does not mean the overall market share of public charter schools is increasing. Instead, this year the market share for public charter schools in DC remained steady at 44%, while more than 1,000 additional students are attending high quality, Tier 1 schools.

In addition, *total* public school enrollment—both charter and traditional public—has grown for the third year in a row, reversing a nearly 40-year old trend. The innovation and competition from public charter schools is bringing families back to the District and driving the transformation of education in the city.

This is because we have made tough decisions to close low-performing schools, maintained a high-bar for approving new schools, and worked relentlessly to remove barriers that would

prevent current schools from spending their energies on teaching and learning.

PCSB takes our chartering authority very seriously. Over the past three years, PCSB has overseen the closure of 12 schools across 10 LEAs for low-performance, while approving only those few applications that meet our standard for approval. Over the past three years, less than 1/3 of new charter school applicants have been approved, a new Montessori school in Ward 5 and an adult education school with campuses in Wards 5 and 8 opened this school year. And another school will open this fall that will serve students in foster care. Again, at PCSB we measure our success not by the total number of students in public charter schools, but by the number of students in *quality* public charter schools.

In the past year PCSB has also continued its efforts to improve collaboration across sectors and across various district agencies. This spring marks the second year of DC's common lottery, MySchool DC, and saw its successful transition to the Deputy Mayor

for Education for FY15. This is also the second year for DC's innovative and nationally recognized Equity Reports, a collaborative effort between PCSB, OSSE and DCPS.

Next week, thanks to a partnership established with the DC Public Library, DC Prep Public Charter School—Benning Campus will open a brand-new lending library with more than 5,000 books. This is the first partnership of its kind and we hope more will develop in the future.

PCSB also collaborated with numerous other District agencies, the full details of which can be found in the written responses to our oversight questions provided to the Committee. We look forward to continuing to work side-by-side with partners across District government in the new year.

While the improvements of PCSB and public charter schools over the past year are remarkable, with more than 7,200 unique names on charter school waitlists, we know that there is more to be done to expand quality and choice in DC.

Yes, discipline rates have improved, but we know more needs to be done to reduce exclusionary discipline to keep students in school, while also maintaining schools' flexibility to set disciplinary policies they believe to be in the best interest of their students.

The number of fiscally high-performing schools has nearly tripled since 2010, from 11 to 31, but limits to PCSB's fiscal oversight authority prevent us from confirming that all public funds are being spent on the students. We look forward to finding a solution with this Council to ensure PCSB can be more effective in its oversight of charter management organizations to ensure all schools are good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

We are proud of the continued growth of student performance, but are also aware that too many public school students still attend low-performing schools, and that the transition from DC CAS to PARCC will present new and unique challenges to all public schools in the District.

Lastly, we are hopeful that we can continue to expedite the process of making facilities more readily available for public charter schools. More than 20 charter school organizations are in need of new and additional facilities, while more than 1.7 million square feet of unused DC-owned buildings that could be used for public charter schools remain available. Providing these buildings for charter schools would solidify their role as full partners in the transformation of education in DC.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Chairman Grosso, we appreciate your commitment to improving student achievement in the District, and the great working relationships we have already developed with you and your staff. We look forward to continuing to partner with you as you begin your Chairmanship of this committee. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.