



**Testimony of  
Naomi DeVeaux, Deputy Director  
DC Public Charter School Board**

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

**DC Council Hearing on Truancy and Attendance  
Joint Hearing--Committee on Education and Committee of the  
Whole**

**Phil Mendelson, Chairman  
David Grosso, Committee on Education Chairman**

**June 29, 2014  
11 a.m., Wilson Building Room 123**

Good morning, and thank you for bringing together this hearing  
on truancy in DC public and public charter schools. My name is

Naomi Rubin DeVeaux, and I am the Deputy Director of the DC Public Charter School Board.

PCSB's goal is to provide Washington DC students and their families with quality public charter school options. PCSB achieves this through a comprehensive application review process, effective oversight, meaningful support and active involvement of parents, school leaders, the community and policy makers.

An important part of this oversight is closely monitoring attendance and truancy at DC public charter schools. Numerous studies and PCSB's own analysis demonstrate the link between attendance and student performance. Our analysis indicates that students with fewer than 10 absences, excused or unexcused, scored an average of 11 points higher on the DC CAS exam than those with 10 or more absences.

Fortunately, thanks to the hard work of teachers and school leaders, public charter schools continue to post better truancy and

in-seat attendance rates. Through May of this year, the truancy rate for public charter schools was 12.8%. Continuing a two-year trend of reduction in truancy at public charter schools, falling from 19% in SY 2012-2013. At K-12 public charter schools alone, the rate has fallen from 24% in SY 12-13 to 17.5% in SY 14-15.

However, we also know that when it comes to absences, it matters very little whether the student is excused or unexcused; the impact on learning is the same. With that in mind, PCSB places particular emphasis not just on the truancy rate, but also the in-seat attendance rate, or the number of days a student is actually present in school. This rate also remains strong in public charter schools. Through the end of May, that unverified rate for SY 14-15 was 91.4%.

We realize that more work remains to be done to ensure students are in school every day, ready to learn. Truancy and absenteeism can often be a sign of larger problems for a student that may impact

a student's ability to achieve in school, and may be an indicator that additional interventions are needed.

PCSB's truancy policy seeks to reduce absenteeism by helping schools focus resources on families who need the most help while allowing schools to show *improvements* within the school year. We focus on helping schools improve their data processes and transparencies, so that trends in the data can more easily be spotted and troubleshooting can occur more easily.

We enforce this policy using a dashboard that allows PCSB staff *and* schools to track improvement or declines in truancy and attendance at the school and student-level. Schools with unusually high truancy rates are issued Notices of Concern, and schools with unusual data trends are audited to ensure the accuracy of the data. When schools improve the attendance rates of the majority of their truant students, and document significant efforts to conduct outreach and interventions with the students and their family, the

notice of concern is lifted. In the past year, four schools were issued notices of concern for high truancy rates. This is down from school year 2013-2014, in which 10 schools were issued notices.

The 2014-15 school year, we implemented a revised truancy policy in which PCSB notified schools in real-time if they reached truancy thresholds. Previously this was done in quarterly reports, which meant that students may not have been given the attention that they needed as soon as possible. The new methodology, using real-time data, gave the schools the tools that they needed to implement intervention strategies more expeditiously. And we will continue to do this in the upcoming school year as we work with OSSE to consolidate enrollment and attendance collection.

We are looking forward to continuing to collaborate with other District agencies in approaching these challenges. PCSB is an active participant in the Truancy Task Force convened by the DME. As I just mentioned, we are currently finalizing plans with OSSE to

further clarify how this data is collected from schools, in order to ease and simplify the burden of reporting this data to make it useful. We are hopeful that this will allow schools to focus more resources on implementing interventions with students who may be in need.

We also look forward to continuing our relationship with various District agencies, such as CFSA, that also work on this issue. By working with these agencies, and helping our schools to do so as well, we are hopeful that we can better implement early interventions to ensure students are receiving the supports they need to get to school to learn each day.

Our approach to reducing truancy and maintaining high in-seat attendance rates is reflective of PCSB's approach to effective authorizing and oversight. We place heavy emphasis on data and transparency, and shed light on where our schools are succeeding and where they need to improve. We offer incentives, not mandates,

and give schools flexibility in their practices in exchange for strong accountability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We share your commitment to increasing attendance and reducing truancy in the District to ensure that all children have a chance to achieve academically. I am happy to take any questions you may have.