



**Testimony of
Michelle Walker-Davis, Executive Director
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Literacy, NAEP, and PARCC Hearing
Committee of the Whole
December 7, 2022**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on literacy, NAEP, and PARCC assessments. I am Dr. Michelle Walker-Davis, the Executive Director of the DC Public Charter School Board.

Like other communities across the country, it is clear the impacts of the pandemic have resulted in learning loss for DC public charter school students. The recent PARCC assessment scores are concerning, but we did expect to see decreases in proficiency after distance learning and the other challenges of the pandemic. However, we are confident that the District will rebound and come back stronger than before. With the city's support of strategic interventions, comprehensive social and emotional supports, innovative policies, and excellent educators, DC can improve education outcomes.

Learning acceleration is top of mind for all educators. I want to thank the Mayor, OSSE, and DME for all the investments made to support students in these difficult times. Thousands of public charter school students have participated in either high-impact tutoring, summer acceleration programs, summer youth employment, or other enrichment opportunities the city funds. The pandemic has also brought a renewed focus on ensuring every child obtains effective literacy skills, especially at the early elementary level. Public charter schools are hiring additional literacy staff and implementing the Science of Reading in their instruction. Through these investments, public charter schools are building a strong foundation for their students that will prepare them to succeed across grade levels. DC PCSB also appreciates the Council's focus on the Science of Reading and LETRS in the FY23 budget, and we hope that public charter school teachers will have access to the training opportunities in the future.

The pandemic forced our city to reevaluate how things were done before. The past few years have highlighted longstanding inequities, especially in our education system. At DC PCSB, we have rejected the status quo and are pushing toward more innovative and bold acts to enhance our students' education attainment. It is hard work to break down the barriers which have existed for generations, but we believe it is time to fully commit ourselves to

that. Currently, we are seeking input from school leaders and staff, data experts, data modeling experts, and other analysts to develop a Revised Accountability Framework that will measure school performance based on student outcomes and is a more rigorous and equitable benchmark.

While the draft framework is still being refined, I can tell you that our vision is that the performance of student subgroups will be a central part of our evaluation of achievement and progress. All students deserve an excellent education, especially those furthest from opportunity. A school cannot be excellent unless it is equitable. It is our goal for the revised accountability framework to set a higher bar for public charter schools and the city writ large.

Academic performance has always been key to our authorizing and expansion decisions. Currently, we require LEAs seeking an enrollment ceiling increase to have Tier 1 status, because we only want to expand schools with proven academic track records. The criteria to open a school or increase enrollment has been and will continue to be deeply rooted in our accountability framework. And we will update that criteria to reflect our revised framework once it is implemented.

Lastly, DC PCSB and LEAs recognize that recovering learning and improving literacy require more than academic supports. Students cannot perform their best in school, or even be ready to learn, if other basic needs are not met. Students need to feel safe, supported, and cared for by their community, and that is reflected in what policies are in place at our schools. Many public charter schools are integrating social emotional learning practices and lessons in classrooms, prioritizing mental health by hiring social workers, and collaborating with safe passage programs. These interventions are necessary for improving learning and recovering from the pandemic. Given that, we appreciate Council's focus on these areas and hope it continues.

I am proud of the work DC PCSB has done and will continue to do in one of the most consequential times in education history. We cannot ignore the challenges ahead to improve the education system for our great city's young people. However, I and everyone at DC PCSB are hopeful that we will not just get back to pre-pandemic education outcomes, but that we will exceed them. This work will not be done passively; we are optimistic because of our organization's commitment to raising the bar for ourselves and the schools we authorize.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, and I look forward to your questions.