



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

**DCPCSB Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Education  
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Good afternoon Chairman Grosso and members of the Committee. My name is Darren Woodruff and I am the Chair of the DC Public Charter School Board. I am joined today by our Executive Director Scott Pearson and Deputy Director Naomi Rubin DeVeaux. I am honored to be here for the last time in my capacity as the board's chair.

Looking back at my time on the board, I am proud of what we have accomplished and how far we've come to improve public education in this city. When I began my service at the DC Public Charter School Board in December 2008, there were 96 public charter schools operated by 60 charter LEAs. Some were high performing, but others were not, and the DC charter sector labored under the public perception that many of its schools weren't that good and didn't represent an added value to educational choices in the District. I was determined to do something about this, and, since I joined the board we have significantly increased our focus on school quality and on providing quality school options to students and families across the city. We began our work developing our Performance Management Framework when I and our current Vice Chair arrived and released it in 2011. Since then, the PMF has become a model of school accountability for

the rest of the country to emulate. Importantly, the PMF and our school quality reports made it easier for parents across the district to navigate the sometimes-difficult school selection process. Our focus on accountability has also led us to make many difficult decisions to close low-performing schools. Since I began my term on the board we have overseen the closure of forty. It is now rare to hear that there are too many low-quality charter schools in the district.

At the same time, we have actively sought to grow our best schools, and approve promising new applications to bring more quality options for parents. In my time on the board we have approved 29 new charter LEAs and an additional 32 new campuses of existing charter LEAs.

These new schools include five new adult-serving charter schools – Academy of Hope, Community College Prep, LAYC Career Academy, Goodwill Excel and the Family Place. I am proud that during my tenure on the board we have more than doubled the number of adult schools. We also oversaw the expansion of bilingual programs in the District, including, with the help of this Council, opening DC International, a middle throughhigh school serving the graduates of five bilingual charter schools. All of our bilingual programs are racially and economically diverse, academically high-performing, and in high demand by DC families across the city.

Our focus on quality has paid off. There are more students attending Tier 1 public charter schools than ever before. And this has led to a steady growth in enrollment, even as charter waitlists grow longer and longer.

And while charter school enrollment grew during my tenure, I and our board are pleased that DCPS enrollment did as well. Indeed, since 2009 total public school enrollment in DC has grown by over 20,000 students – nearly 1/3 – as parents gained new confidence in our schools. I would like to think that our work as an authorizer contributed to this growth and to the revitalization of Washington, DC.

DC public charter schools provide parents and students with almost unending choices. Each is unique. What they have in common is a commitment to excellence. We set the bar high for all of our schools, while allowing the freedom and flexibility to manage their school in the way that best aligns with their educational philosophy. This flexibility in operational strategies allow for the fostering of innovation and are crucial to each school's success. And students and parents are able to examine the array of choices available to them and make the best school choice for their educational needs.

I am proud to say that public charter school graduation rates have steadily increased each year while in-seat attendance has remained above

90% and expulsions have been cut 80% from a decade ago. In the last three years alone, graduation rates at public charter schools in all subgroups have outperformed or been equal to those of traditional public schools. Even subgroups that are often found to be the least likely to graduate, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged, and African-American students have outperformed their traditional public school peers. And each year after staff has verified the transcripts of each graduate, I have the honor of reading each graduate's name as I sign their diploma.

These gains are a testament to the outstanding work that DC public charter school teachers and administrators have done. While the student population of DC public charter schools is equally or sometimes more disadvantaged than the district average, our test scores grow each year and consistently outperform those of traditional public schools for key populations. This year, the ELA and math PARCC scores of our African American, at-risk, and economically disadvantaged students outperformed DCPS by four to eight percentage points.

There is, however, much more work to be done. The 2017 PARCC results, while slightly higher than the previous year, show how far we still must go to adequately prepare all our students for college and career success. Just around a quarter of our students are scoring a 4 or higher on the PARCC assessment, and this is far too low. Our achievement gap is far

too high. Students with disabilities, English Learners, and at-risk populations across the district in particular, need more support if we are to close the achievement gap. It is my great hope that my colleagues on the board will continue to make progress in closing this gap.

I am also proud of our work in reducing exclusionary discipline in our schools. When I first started at the Board, the numbers - when they could be relied on - told a different story than they do today. Expulsions could be counted in triple digits. The suspension rate was hovering around 14%. Now, through the hard work of schools to proactively address student discipline, those numbers have vastly improved. Expulsions have been cut by 80% and the overall suspension rate cut by almost half. We have worked collaboratively with LEAs to review our policies and determine best practices to keep kids in the classroom while still maintaining the safety of all students and faculty. These positive changes, which our board will continue to support, have without a doubt played a part in the successes and gains our students have made in increasing proficiency rates on standardized tests while addressing truancy, absenteeism, and suspensions and expulsions.

As I think about the challenges ahead, particularly in closing our achievement gap, I want to applaud your work, Mr. Chairman, in focusing on discipline in our schools, mental health supports for trauma exposed students and out-of-school time. Over my career in education I have increasingly concluded that only when we focus on the needs of the whole

child will we make progress academically. This is the work not only of our schools but of our entire government – indeed of our entire community.

Allowing students to arrive early and stay late not only gives them more face to face time with their teachers, but also decreases the number of hours students are unsupervised and provides safe, positive activities for students to hone their skills and develop new interests. Moreover, when schools provide a summer school program it also decreases the likelihood of summer educational losses that typically occur with underserved populations. While these programs are costly, the schools are clearly meeting a need of the students and their families.

As I look back on my time at the Board, I could not be prouder of the successes we've achieved. Yet I am also humbled by how far we have to go. In our work, we value the collaboration with the Council and our educational partners at DCPS, OSSE, and DME to solve these challenges. We know that working together will help better provide high quality educational choices for Washington DC families.

Thank you, Chairman Grosso for your leadership and support of public charter schools during my time on the board. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.