



**Testimony of Scott Pearson  
Executive Director  
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Hearing on the Critical Risk Rate School Funding  
Designation Act of 2019  
Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education  
March 10, 2020**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and councilmembers, thank you for holding this hearing to discuss an important resource, the at-risk funding, for DC schools.

At-risk funding targets supports to students in low-income families and other students who are at risk of academic failure. Historically, public charter schools utilize at-risk funding allocations to hire additional staff for one-on-one student support, offer extended day programming, and provide direct services to students from social workers, counselors, and therapists. This additional funding is vital to the success of all students, especially our at-risk students. While we are grateful to Mayor Bowser for her decision to increase the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) by 4% for FY 2021, we acknowledge the reality that the education budget remains underfunded in the District.

The Critical Risk Rate School Funding Designation Act of 2019 seeks to amend the school funding formula by creating a new category to allow for additional funding to public schools that have an at-risk student population of 70 percent and above. While we support the spirit of the legislation, we question whether this approach is the most effective means of achieving equitable outcomes for at-risk students – a subgroup of students constituting 46 percent of the student population in the District. As written, this bill would only apply to 16 public charter school campuses. If the threshold were lowered to 50%, it would affect 64 campuses in total. Given that the majority of our schools serve a student population closer to 50% at-risk, this bill disproportionately impacts our schools and exacerbate inequities at the student level.

As an alternative to prioritizing some at-risk students over others, as this legislation ultimately does, we think that a first step is to supplement the budget equitably by increasing the at-risk weight from 0.225 to 0.37, thereby

increasing the per pupil supplemental allocation from \$2,470 to \$3,900, in line with recommendations outlined in the 2013 DC Education Adequacy Study. An increase in the allocation would allow our schools to provide more robust programming and wraparound services for students across the city, allowing for agencies to extend their reach.

Another step should be the expansion of the at-risk definition. Presently, the law, classifies a student as at-risk if they qualify for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program or the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program; were identified as homeless or in foster care; or are high school students at least one year older than the expected age for their grade. An expansion of the definition could include families who receive WIC benefits or undocumented students, for example, to capture vulnerable populations that are in need. Doing so would truly allow public schools the opportunity to utilize at-risk funding as a tool to advance educational equity in the District.

DC PCSB is appreciative of the at-risk funding provided by this Council. The generous investment has been so important to our schools' efforts to close the achievement gap and ensure that all children achieve their potential, regardless of their circumstances. In truth, if we are going to address how we can better serve at-risk students, we need to take a comprehensive approach. This approach includes the ideas I mentioned earlier but also includes looking at preferences as well as the effectiveness of wraparound services. We are now seven years past the adequacy study and have adopted only a few of the recommendations. We know allocations in funding vary by LEA and we have learned that each student body has separate and distinct needs that cannot always be covered by the UPSFF given rising costs. We urge this Council to adopt a more holistic approach to expand opportunities for our students and accelerate their achievement.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SP', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Scott Pearson  
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