



**TESTIMONY OF DON SOIFER
DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD
DC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
CONFIRMATION ROUNDTABLE
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Chairman Grosso and Members of the Education Committee, I deeply appreciate this opportunity to speak with you regarding my proposed reappointment to the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) and I'd like to thank Mayor Bowser for nominating me to serve another term.

The success of the District of Columbia's thriving public charter school sector, widely regarded as one of the nation's highest-performing, is very much the product of commitment and collaboration of an entire remarkable community.

I would like to offer some observations on the most important work the Board has accomplished during my tenure, and to discuss priorities to prepare for the future.

DC PCSB derives its authority from having a strong charter school law. This legal framework, providing for a robust, independent chartering authority with its seven-member board with the active support of the Council and Mayor, has allowed some of the finest public charter schools in the nation to open their doors and serve our students. It has also helped make DC a destination for talented educators, an accomplishment of even greater importance as we work together to serve the needs of a growing student population over the next decade, if the projections prove correct.

During my tenure, every board action has been driven and characterized by an unwavering commitment to ensuring students and families who are searching for seats in quality schools find them. As I have participated in every board meeting since taking my oath of office, I have seen our authorizing get stronger and the quality of our public charter schools continue to improve and outpace city averages on multiple indicators. In the time that I've taken every week to review staff reports, talk with parents, school leaders, students and other stakeholders in our communities, and tour schools regularly to better understand their work and operation, my appreciation has grown for the success and progress our schools across the District have made.

As a Board member I have voted to approve 21 new schools. Among these are schools, such as Children’s Guild PCS, Monument PCS, Goodwill Excel PCS, and just last month Sustainable Futures PCS – all of which focus on educating our most vulnerable populations.

I plan to continue to emphasize the importance of smart, quality authorizing, for this and the next generation of students, including those who have been most underserved by public education opportunities across our city.

However, chartering simply to meet family demand is not enough. Since the early development of the Performance Management Framework (PMF) underway when I joined the board, its evolution as a tool to serve families has been a top priority. Today it is frequently described as a national model for charter school accountability.

Earlier this year we released the first Adult Education PMF with tiers, as we have done with our early childhood, elementary and secondary performance frameworks. In the era of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, accountability remains critical, and common measures across public schools are important tools for students and families as we continue to hold public charter schools to high standards.

Transparency has steadily grown. We’ve found using data like attendance, suspension and expulsion rates and student mobility, can improve the quality of the sector’s educational opportunities. Today the Board’s website offers families volumes of clear, useful and easily comparable student performance information, publicly available, wide-ranging and aligned with the educational needs of the city, to a degree that is setting the standard for public education nationally.

The success of public charter schools in DC is enhanced by our Board’s willingness to make tough decisions that adhere to the School Reform Act, even when faced with opposition from stakeholders. I’ve voted to close or accept a school relinquishing their charter for 33 public charter school campuses, for academic or financial reasons. This work which while difficult is an explicit responsibility of quality charter authorizing.

I am appreciative of the Committee’s leadership to ensure all students across the city have access to a quality education, and for this opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to any questions you may have.