



Testimony of
Don Soifer, Board Member and Chair of PCSB Finance Committee
DC Public Charter School Board
Education Budget Oversight Hearing
DC Council Committee on Education
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Chairman Grosso, and members of the DC Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Don Soifer, a member of the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) and the chair of the Board's Finance and Operations Committee. I am joined by Scott Pearson, our Executive Director, Naomi DeVeaux, our Deputy Director, and my colleague Board Member Rick Cruz.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today about PCSB and our budget. At PCSB, our goal is to ensure that students and families in DC have access to quality public charter education. Schools under our oversight are offering diverse and quality educational choices to families across the city. In the past year, DC has been recognized nationally for having the strongest charter sector in the nation and PCSB has been recognized as a leading authorizer. We are proud of these

accomplishments and look forward to continuing this progress in the next fiscal year.

Today we would like to discuss how we use our budget to support quality public charter schools in the District.

Last year the Council approved an increase in the oversight fee PCSB charges to public charter schools from 0.5% to 1.0% of each school's annual budget. This increase replaces the specific appropriation from the Council, and has greatly reduced our reliance on philanthropic gifts, without affecting the quality of our oversight. Thank you, Chairman Grosso, for your support of this increase.

However, in light of slowing enrollment growth in public charter schools, as well as a decrease in philanthropic giving to PCSB, we anticipate a decrease of \$258,185 in our budget – or 3% – from FY15 to FY16. In preparation for this anticipated decrease, we believe we have found cost savings that will allow us to improve the quality of our oversight despite the spending reduction.

For example, by hiring an additional data analyst, we were able to greatly reduce our reliance on outside consultants for the implementation of the Performance Management Framework (PMF) as well as our spending on ProActive, PCSB's primary tool for collecting enrollment, demographic, attendance and discipline data from public charter schools. Together, these decisions will result in a savings of \$230,000 for FY16.

The majority of our budget goes directly to our core functions: a comprehensive charter application review process and effective oversight, providing meaningful support to schools, and actively involving parents, school leaders, the community and policymakers. We have expanded our resources devoted to helping schools serve special education students and English language learners. And, over the past 18 months have added a manager of intergovernmental relations and a strategic planner, to help us better coordinate with stakeholders across the city for the benefit of children.

By FY16 we will have extended our innovative Performance Management Framework from K-12 to cover early childhood and adults. This is in addition to the work we have already done in creating and implementing the Alternative PMF for schools with missions that focus on students who are most at-risk of underperforming academically. These new tools will allow families and students to make better-informed choices about their education.

We also use data and transparency as powerful tools to improve school performance. PCSB annually publishes data on not only a school's academic performance but also attendance, discipline, and finances. We study this data monthly, and follow up with outlier schools. The results have been promising, with continued proficiency growth in reading and math, reduced suspensions and expulsions, and fewer fiscally low performing schools.

Our budget also represents a continued commitment to engaging with the community about public charter schools. Late last year, we overhauled our website so that parents would have the tools they need to find a public charter school that fits the need of their student. The launch has been an overwhelming success, with website traffic up 26% since the launch, and the amount of time visitors spend viewing our content increasing by 21%. The PCSB website, which we use to broadcast live meetings and share important information with the community now averages more than 25,000 monthly visitors.

We have also been working to offer community members more opportunities to learn about PCSB's processes and provide input. For example, this spring we have increased our engagement with the community on the 2015 spring charter application process, attending meetings across the city to discuss the five new charter applicants and PCSB's approval process, as well as hosting our first-ever Twitter Town Hall. We plan to continue to increase this engagement with parents and community leaders in FY16.

We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish while maintaining a total budget that amounts to a fraction of one percent of total education spending in the city.

In closing, we also urge the Council and city leaders to address the funding and facilities inequities between public charter schools and DCPS. With charter

schools serving 44% of public school students and continuing to meet high academic standards it is time to treat the schools as full partners in the transformation of education in Washington, DC.

Finally, we'd like to thank you Chairman Grosso, for your leadership in support of high-quality educational options for all children and adults in our city, and specifically for your continued advocacy for increased funding for mental health professionals and school nurses that are greatly needed in many charter schools. We look forward to continuing to work with you to move toward having these resources in all charter schools.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.