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ON THE PATH TO GREAT EDUCATIONAL RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

HEARING

BEFORE THE

OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE

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ON THE PATH TO GREAT EDUCATIONAL RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2008

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in Room SD–342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senator Akaka.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA

Senator AKAKA. This hearing will come to order.

Good morning and welcome to all of you. I look upon this as a very important hearing, and thank you for joining us today for the second in a series of hearings on the District of Columbia Public School system reforms. I know you all have been working diligently and hard, and I want to commend all of you for the improvements thus far. I look forward to hearing more about the progress you have made and your further intentions.

As you may know, before being elected to Congress, I was a teacher and a principal. I was in the school system in Hawaii. I know firsthand the challenges facing any educational system, the care it takes to bring about reforms, the needed investment in clear strategic plans, and the critical importance of providing quality education to underserved populations.

You have made many tough decisions already and taken noteworthy steps, but expectations are high. A number of accountability measures have been put into place including weekly meetings at all levels of DC Government, which hold senior level staff and officials accountable for their efforts.

Given how critical this issue is for DC children, I asked the Government Accountability Office to review the progress of the reforms and make recommendations for improvements. The short-term study, which we will hear the results of today, confirms significant improvements in the system and fundamental changes, such as management restructuring, reviewing teacher and employee stand-

ards, development of strategic plans, and addressing crumbling facilities.

To guide these reforms and build upon these efforts, one of GAO's recommendations is that a system-wide strategic plan should be developed. I agree with this finding. For all major transformational reform efforts, it is important that there be a strategy for the future.

The strategic plan should be a transparent, living document focused on the students with a clear vision for all DC agencies to understand their roles and their responsibilities.

We are looking at a fast-moving train. Every day new changes occur in the school system, testing the hope and expectations of parents, teachers, the community, and, most importantly, the children and the students.

I hope today we can gain a better understanding of the progress made and gain a greater understanding of future plans, and so I look forward to all of our witnesses this morning.

Our first panel is Cornelia Ashby, who is the Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues, Government Accountability Office; Michelle Rhee, Chancellor of the DC Public Schools; Victor Reinoso, Deputy Mayor for Education, District of Columbia; Deborah Gist, DC State Superintendent of Education; and Allen Lew, Executive Director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization.

Our Committee rules require that all witnesses testify under oath. Therefore, I ask each of you to stand and please raise your right hand. Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to give the Subcommittee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Ms. ASHBY. I do.

Ms. RHEE. I do.

Mr. REINOSO. I do.

Ms. GIST. I do.

Mr. LEW. I do.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Let it be noted in the record that the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Welcome again. Before we begin, I want you all to know that although your oral statement is limited to 5 minutes, your full statements will be included in the record.

So, Ms. Ashby, would you please proceed with your statement?

TESTIMONY OF CORNELIA M. ASHBY,[1] DIRECTOR, EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND INCOME SECURITY ISSUES, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Ms. ASHBY. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here this morning to present information on the District's progress in reforming its public school system. Early reform efforts have focused largely on broad critical management issues and other activities that provide the foundation for long-term improvement. In addition to developing and implementing transitional plans to establish the new governance structure required by the 2007 Reform Act, early reform efforts have included human capital, data, school consolida-

[1] The prepared statement of Ms. Ashby appears in the Appendix on page 41.

tion, facilities, Federal grants management, and some performance and strategic planning initiatives, as well as setting academic priorities.

With respect to human capital, new personnel rules and new systems for evaluating the performance of central office employees and employees of the State Superintendent's Office were developed. According to DC Public Schools officials, as of January, all staff had received performance evaluations based on District Government-wide competencies. Officials at the State Superintendent's Office told us that individual performance plans had been developed for all staff, and performance evaluations based on those plans will begin later this month.

Both the State Superintendent's Office and DCPS are working to improve their data systems to track and monitor the performance of students, teachers, and schools. The Superintendent's Office is building a longitudinal database. The database is expected to be fully operational by 2012.

DCPS is consolidating its data systems, eliminating duplicate information, and verifying data accuracy. DCPS officials told us they expect the new student data management system to be operational by February 2009. In addition, DCPS is moving from a paper-based to an electronic personnel data system.

Steps have also been taken to consolidate schools and set academic priorities. This month, DCPS finalized its school consolidation plan, which identifies over 20 schools for closure in an effort to provide more resources to the remaining schools.

In the area of academic achievement, DCPS has set academic priorities for the current school year and is in the process of establishing longer-term priorities DCPS is currently working on a 5-year academic plan.

To address the backlog of work orders and ongoing facilities needs, the new Facilities Office made repairs to over 70 schools last summer and in early fall. It also assessed the condition of heating and air conditioning systems in all District schools. According to the Facilities Director, repairs were made to school heating systems, and all schools had heat by October 15. In addition, he told us all schools with central air conditioning received upgrades, and about 670 new air conditioning units were installed. Last fall, the Facilities Office also began making improvements to the remaining schools. The Facilities Office is revising the DCPS 2006 Master Facilities Plan. According to District officials, the revised plan, which is to be completed by the end of May, will align with the chancellor's academic priorities and school consolidation efforts.

The State superintendent has begun to address long-term grant management and No Child Left Behind Act compliance deficiencies identified by the U.S. Department of Education. For example, to meet the No Child Left Behind State level requirements, the State superintendent is establishing a process for providing technical assistance to underperforming schools. The State superintendent has told us that her office has started to develop a strategic plan that will include measurable goals and objectives and expects to complete the plan this summer.

The mayor and education officials have also developed a performance-based process designed to establish accountability for these

school reform efforts. As you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the process includes holding weekly meetings to track progress and accomplishments across education offices, as well as requiring these offices to develop and follow annual performance plans. The DC Department of Education has taken some steps to coordinate and integrate the various efforts of the District education offices. However, it has not developed a District-wide strategic education plan.

While developing a long-term strategic plan takes time, it is useful for entities undergoing transformation, such as the DC Public School system. A strategic plan and the process of developing one helps organizations look across the goals of multiple offices and determine whether they are aligned and connected or working at cross purposes. By articulating an overall mission or vision, a strategic plan helps organizations set priorities, implementation strategies, and timelines to measure the progress of multiple offices. A long-term strategic plan is also an important communication tool, articulating a consistent set of goals and marking progress for employees and key stakeholders. Given that leadership changes, a strategic plan would provide a road map for future District leaders. For these reasons, we recommend, as you also mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the development of a District-wide education strategic plan.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Ashby. Ms. Rhee.

TESTIMONY OF MICHELLE RHEE,[1] CHANCELLOR, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ms. RHEE. Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka. When I last testified before you, I said that I would rebuild the public school system in Washington, DC. I described plans to overhaul flawed data and accountability systems, create a culture of individual accountability for student achievement, build strong leadership and high-quality teaching in our schools, reform special education, and address multiple other areas to increase student achievement. As my evaluation of the system has deepened over the last 8 months, I have been shocked by the profound level of dysfunction under which DCPS has been operating. I met high school seniors who want to go to college next year but who had just learned about prepositions. I heard from teachers who had not been paid for the work they had done 3 years ago. And I met elementary school students who sent me a "wish list" for their school. They asked if they could have a music teacher, a Spanish teacher, a librarian, and other basic things for which no children should have to lobby their chancellor for.

These are not just anecdotes. What saddens me most is what the performance data says about what this system is doing to kids. According to our DC–CAS data, 50 of our schools have proficiency rates lower than 20 percent in either reading or math. This means that four out of five kids in those schools do not meet even the most basic level of proficiency. We are talking about almost 14,000 children.

[1] The prepared statement of Ms. Rhee appears in the Appendix on page 66.

Residents of the District have rightly demanded radical change, and we are responding swiftly. In this transitional year, we have begun to remove the obstacles that block student achievement. We are solving the problems that need to be solved, and I look forward to discussing this work with you today. However, this system needs more than solving problems one at a time. This year we are laying the foundations for my long-term strategy, building our priorities and goals for the next 5 years. On these foundations we will build the system to give our children the skills they need and the choices in life that they deserve.

I am going to talk a little bit about some of the things that we have done so far.

First, this year, after receiving multiple reports of problems with our central office, we have swiftly and aggressively moved to solve them. From former employees who were still receiving benefits and paychecks that they could not explain, to teachers who had not been paid and parents who could not get an employee to return a phone call, there were so many issues to confront that I set up a constituent services team to help parents and school staff navigate the central office. I learned that many staff members do not have job descriptions and that they had never received a performance evaluation. We responded. I communicated the mayor's higher customer service standards to all employees and lobbied for personnel legislation that would allow us to increase the efficiency of our central office as a whole and to create a culture of accountability. We are reorganizing the central office as we speak so that people's skills and performance are best suited to their positions and office. We created job descriptions for all employees and conducted our first round of performance evaluations. We have previously non-responsive employees who, after just one performance evaluation, are now working harder at their jobs. In the past 4 months, our customer satisfaction rate with the central office response has jumped from 41 percent to 59 percent, and I am confident that will continue to improve.

Reforming DCPS requires that we have the best principals leading our schools. Previous DCPS recruiting has been minimal, but through a new principal recruitment campaign, we are interviewing and identifying quality school leaders. We have already received close to 500 applications, and we expect this number to grow as more prospective candidates begin considering their options for next year.

Recruitment, however, is only half the task. To keep strong employees, leaders must recognize and reward good work. In the Nation's capital it is time for us to back our words about respecting successful educators with the investment that will keep them in our schools. We started this year by utilizing Federal funds to give what we call TEAM Awards to schools that showed dramatic gains in student achievement, and my long-term plans aim to increase performance awards to teachers and schools.

In the past, DCPS has not supported teachers by providing them with the training they needed to drive instruction forward, and in a massive effort this year, we are turning around professional development. Before, there was no consistency in the quality of instruction across the District, and parents were rightfully frustrated

by this disparity. Now, we are teaching our teachers how to use the best practices for reading and math instruction and making instruction consistent across the system.

Also, we are showing our teachers how to use test data to drive instruction and abolishing the "drill and kill" style of teaching often associated with standardized tests. For example, the reading portion of the DC–CAS measures students' ability to read for meaning, a skill that this District as a whole has failed to provide. We are training teachers to use "constructed response" questions to teach children how to show reading comprehension through fully developed written responses. This is not "test prep." It is good teaching, and it is what gives children the skills that they will need as adults.

We are also providing a monthly professional development calendar full of options across the District. These options are aligned to the specific needs of teachers and students as identified through testing data, surveys, and school observations. Not only will this help the District to track professional development for each teacher, it will support our teachers in honing their craft. Overall, our work in professional development this year increases our ability to retain the teachers we need, when too often in this field, isolation and a lack of support lead to preventable burnout.

Since I have arrived, I have received an education in just how severe our problems with data management are. An initial assessment revealed that we have 27 disconnected data systems in the DC Public Schools. An update in one location did not automate an update in other areas where similar information was stored. This affected even the most basic operations. For example, in September when I attempted to send an e-mail to all teachers, my in-box was filled with returns from defunct e-mail accounts, and I was advised that I should back up the mailing with a paper letter sent to individual schools. Now, with continued outreach to schools and new connected data systems, this longstanding communication problem is being corrected. Through a collaborative effort with Human Resources, we have updated our teacher e-mail list from 45 percent accuracy to about 75 percent. Also this school year we worked with the city's chief technology officer to install 5,900 PCs in our schools so that every single DCPS classroom teacher has a working computer. They will use these new computers to view student data, take attendance, conduct research, take advantage of professional development opportunities, and, finally, to receive my e-mails.

Streamlining our data systems is a massive undertaking that will occur over the next few years, but it is one of my highest priorities. In every area of DCPS, my long-term objective is to use data as every good organization does: To improve performance. My chief data and accountability officer has been successful in streamlining these systems in other districts, and I am confident that our plans for the District's data systems will result in significant progress in our offices and classrooms.

Many schools had significant needs that require immediate attention this year. First, some of our schools are without psychologists, guidance counselors, school nurses, art or music teachers. Teachers are forced to attempt to provide the services that they are not equipped to provide, especially when I needed them to focus on

instruction. Our schools with low enrollment numbers are particularly hard to staff. Schools were paying to maintain unused space when we need that money to staff the school and provide strong programs. In November, we introduced a plan to right-size the school system and bring strong new academic initiatives and a full staffing model to our schools over time. We are working through the remainder of the school year and summer to prepare schools for upcoming transitions due to school closures and new programs.

We also have a number of schools that are not meeting Academic Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act, and we are carefully assessing the options available under the law to make the right decisions for each school. We will use these assessments to create plans for each school, not only to correct problems but to align their programs with our longer-term plans for success.

I know I am running over. Do you want me to continue?

Senator AKAKA. Yes.

Ms. RHEE. OK. Special education in this District has been a real and deep hardship for many students and families. I have not only been shocked by the mistakes that have led to the loss of millions of dollars that could have been used to serve instruction, but also, more importantly, I have been saddened by the damage that DCPS has done by over-identifying students who should not have been classified and by failing to support the children who do need services.

We have been aggressive about identifying the root of these problems and correcting them. To start, we will be working with the State superintendent of education to pilot mental health programs in middle schools; to introduce the comprehensive staffing model through the right-sizing plan next year; and to reform our process for identifying students for special needs services by accurately diagnosing learning needs. Our long-term strategies to raise student achievement levels include eight new school-wide applications model schools next year, which have shown tremendous success in urban districts across the country to ensure high achievement for both disabled and nondisabled students. This system currently has a reputation for being the least inclusive in the country when it comes to our special education students, and our focus now is how to become an integrated, inclusive district where we are not segregating these students.

Historically, this system has not done well bringing parents into students' education. Our long-term plans will include the initiatives we need to engage parents in our work in schools. Many parents simply do not know what they can expect, demand, or do to support their children through each stage of the learning process. We are now building the foundations to communicate clearly with parents about their children's progress and about important processes such as college applications. We are holding parent information sessions, opening Parent Resource Centers, conducting focus groups with parents, and increasing our commitment to translating and interpreting information for linguistically and culturally diverse parents.

During this first transition year, I have identified the problems that have been blocking student achievement for years. We are solving these problems. Whether by right-sizing the system, speed-

ing a slow bureaucracy, or improving our data systems, we are building the foundation for a system that works.

After this year we will move into the proactive long-term implementation strategy that will move us beyond correcting current problems to creating model programs. I want a portfolio of quality schools in every ward across this District that provides quality choices to all students and parents. I want a District that fosters a college-going culture in every ward, allowing our students to be as competitive for college as any students in the Nation. Clearly, we are far from seeing the results that I want today. But as I approach the closing months of this school year of transition, I remain determined and am very confident that we are going to see those changes happen.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much for your statement, Ms. Rhee. Mr. Reinoso.

TESTIMONY OF VICTOR REINOSO,[1] DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION, OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Mr. REINOSO. Good morning, Senator. I appear before you today to report on the progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the mayor's public education reform initiatives and on the strategies we are developing to continue that momentum moving forward. First, however, I have to pause to say how incredibly proud I am of the team that the mayor has put together to lead the agencies where the work is happening and of the job that each of them has done thus far to respond to the mayor's charge that we not just reform, but really remake, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and that we do this as quickly as humanly possible. As you will hear in the testimony of each of them, they have made great strides in addressing critical problems within their agencies—in some cases more progress than had been seen in many years before this team took charge—and at the same time, they are developing the long-term strategic plans that will guide us towards continued, systemic improvement in the future.

The District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 enabled the mayor to embark on a sweeping array of initiatives and reforms, some of which have already begun to fundamentally change our approach to public education. My office was established to oversee all of those efforts and to ensure that the entire District Government—including both our education and our non-education agencies—moves forward coherently and in alignment towards our shared goal: Ensuring the success of every student. I have also been charged by the mayor with marshalling all of the District's resources—public, private, and in the community—to improve the educational processes and outcomes for all the District's students in order to prepare them for successful futures. Thus, while each of the witnesses who joins me here will describe his or her own strategic plan to move us toward this goal within the scope of their agency's mission and capabilities, I will discuss the role of my office in coordinating these plans and, as impor-

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Reinoso appears in the Appendix on page 73.

tantly, ensuring that the human and other resources are made available to support their execution.

To accomplish this critical task, I have organized my office around four broad activities: Coordination of a District-wide educational strategy; coordination and direction of high-quality services and programs that reach across city agencies and educational institutions to improve child and youth outcomes; development of robust partnerships with community-based organizations and the private sector that provide the District's education system with critical new resources; and leadership and support to the Office of the State Superintendent, the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and the Ombudsman Office, all of which report through me to the mayor. We are moving successfully forward on several fronts, which I will highlight briefly here.

When we set out to improve our public education system, the mayor made a foundation decision to attack the problem comprehensively. The Administration views education as a continuum from birth into adulthood: Learning is always taking place and access to quality educational opportunities must exist at every level. Also, it is not enough to transform what happens in the classroom; to succeed, we have to meet all of our students' needs, including the needs that students bring from outside the classroom. So as a government, the District must bring to bear all of the resources of its public and private sectors—in a coordinated manner—to support children and learning in order to create an environment in which they can succeed.

My office is well positioned not only to think strategically about the direction of our reform efforts, but also to address specific challenges and tackle special projects that support implementation of the plans of each of these agencies. We are able to take on work that will enable the Chancellor and State superintendent to be more effective in their efforts. For example, my staff has played a leadership role in planning around how to align our education-related infrastructure and resources with outcome-driven priorities—including the rapid closure of key service gaps. This work is continuous and correlates directly with the top priorities of the mayor.

Most recently, my office has been leading the planning and coordination around the school facilities consolidation effort. In this role, we have provided capacity to the chancellor and her team around analyzing data, creating strategies, engaging the community, and, ultimately, developing recommendations for the reorganization plan. This joint effort led to a proposal that will enable the chancellor to drive resources down to the classroom and provide higher quality academic services to students across the city.

We approach the reform agenda from a big-picture perspective. We can identify gaps in academic and support services and work with agencies to close those gaps. One example of the work which is detailed in my written testimony is the support we are providing to DCPS around implementation of an alternative high school model. In addition, the mayor's education initiative is being pursued across numerous fronts, and my office is again uniquely positioned to guide those efforts without being involved in the day-to-day management and operation of the education agencies. This is allowing us to aggressively pursue particular high-priority initia-

tives, restructure and reorganize services, and manage agency performance while keeping an eye on the big picture.

The State superintendent will comment on some of her key priorities, including special education and addressing our high-risk designation for Federal grants. But we continue to support her in a number of other efforts as well: The comprehensive student warehouse, etc. I will not steal her thunder.

Mr. Lew's shop has a more narrowly defined but no less daunting task: To repair, maintain, renovate, modernize, and construct as many of our school facilities as quickly, efficiently, and effectively as possible, and he will expound on those efforts.

But a second critically important function of my office is to lead and coordinate the activities of the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission, more affectionately known as ICSIC, a panel created by the mayor's reform legislation and comprised of the agency heads from over 20 agencies that touch the lives of children and families. ICSIC has a unique ability to identify new ways that we, as a government, can increase the chances of success for our students. Some of the key highlights of the work that has happened there is that we have begun now to develop a school preparedness assessment, which will be piloted this spring in 100 kindergarten classrooms in April and May, with a broader rollout in the fall. We have also improved the tracking of child health indicators. Both of these are examples of how my office sits uniquely positioned not as a day-to-day operating agency, but as one that looks strategically across the government to provide support to the education agencies, and to integrate and align their work and the work of other agencies so that we are moving forward the full potential of children inside and outside the classroom. We have laid the groundwork for progress on a number of goals, and I expect similar accomplishments moving forward.

Finally, as I said, my office is active in the development of school partnerships: Meeting with organizations seeking to support the mayor's reform efforts, tracking down and developing new partnership relationships, reviewing existing partnerships to better understand coverage and gaps and to determine their effectiveness in moving us towards our strategic goals. Since October, we have had dozens of meetings with organizations and have begun to lay the groundwork for, I think, some powerful new partnerships, both at the city-wide level but also at the local school level. I believe the success of these efforts is evidence that the Administration has communicated effectively with external stakeholders about our strategic approach to improving education in the District and shows that there are many people in the private and nonprofit sectors who are ready to help, so long as they feel that their efforts are part of a larger plan to move forward.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to share with you the progress that the District is making, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Reinoso. Ms. Gist.

TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH A. GIST,[1] STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Ms. GIST. Good morning, Senator Akaka, Committee staff and guests, and thank you for having us here. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here to discuss the progress that we have made in the Office of the State Superintendent of Education since we were here to brief you last summer, which is actually before the State functions were moved into our agency. So a lot has happened during that time.

I am going to talk to you about our strategic vision and I am also going to update you on two of the education reform efforts that we have been working on.

The Education Reform Act that was enacted last summer and the transition plan that Mayor Fenty approved identified State-level education functions that were within three different agencies that were transferred into the Office of the State Superintendent of Education on October 1, which was actually just about 5 months ago. And while extracting these State functions from these existing agencies was very complex, I am pleased to be able to tell you today that the transition occurred successfully. We met our goals. It was for the most part completely within our time frame. And the existing functions, including early childhood, for example, are set to transfer, in the near future. We expect the transfer to occur successfully.

As a result of these transfers of responsibilities, we have been able to focus on establishing core foundational components that will allow us to be successful in carrying out our mission and providing the appropriate level of support and oversight to the local education agencies within the District of Columbia. The first of these foundational components that we are reforming, as has been mentioned, is the special education system. Our Federal grants management system is another. And as you know, the U.S. Department of Education has designated us as a high-risk grantee. And I am pleased to let you know that we have made quite a bit of progress, and I will go over just a few of those reforms that we have made on the Federal grants management briefly.

For example, we are ensuring that we have adequate oversight over the use of Federal funds through monitoring of our local education agencies within Washington, DC, which includes DCPS as well as public charter schools. We are developing and refining our financial monitoring systems to ensure fiscal compliance. We are increasing our grants management accountability through the development of evaluation protocols for our LEAs. We are ensuring extensive collaboration with our local education agencies around different reform efforts in order to provide the maximum leveraging of our Federal dollars. And we are ensuring efficient fund allocation and distribution systems so that the Federal funds are allocated and distributed in a more expedited manner, which has been a failure of our system in the past, and also to improve our documentation.

[1] The prepared statement of Ms. Gist appears in the Appendix on page 82.

We are focused on developing a foundation, as has also been talked about, the importance of data, and this has also been a failure of our system in the past as both have access to high-quality data but also to use that data effectively. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education is taking the lead on the development of a State-wide or a District-wide longitudinal education data warehouse that will link together the different data systems that all of our partners within the city are working on. It will include data from the public charter schools, from the DC Public School system, and will span from childhood through higher education and even include adult education.

Thus far, we have created an interim data system that is based on a unique student identifier, which is obviously a key foundational element to any strong data system, and we are currently updating that on a monthly basis, bringing together data that we receive from the LEAs within the District.

We have enhanced the interim student tracking system recently to include richer and more advanced data, including information on the student's grade level, where they are enrolled, their exit dates, and, where applicable, their special education status or their English language learner status.

In addition, we have mapped all of this information to existing student achievement data out of the DC–CAS assessment so that we can not only get a picture of mobility, but so that we can also take a look at what that mobility might mean in terms of student achievement. This interim system will serve as a key foundational component as we move forward in developing that comprehensive data warehouse.

The final foundational component that is central to our reform strategy is the development of our strategic plan. Our mission at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education is for all District residents to receive an excellent education for success in the 21st Century. The framework of the strategic plan that we are currently developing is for all students to be served and supported, that all children will be ready for school, that all students will have access to excellent schools, and, finally, that all residents will be prepared for success in college or in the 21st Century workplace. These goals include functions that we are already responsible for, such as the child nutrition programs, early childhood functions, and responsibilities around student achievement in the District.

So we have a long road ahead of us as we continue on these reform efforts, but I really do believe that there is no greater civil rights challenge that we have right now in our country, and certainly in our city, than ensuring that our children have access and receive a high-quality education at every level of their experience in our systems. And I take that responsibility very seriously, as do the members of our team here, as do the people on our staff. I am confident that providing the proper foundations of reform through efforts like our Federal grants system and the data warehouse—these are tools and things that we need to be operating effectively so that the instruction, the parts that Chancellor Rhee and the teachers that are actually interacting with our students every day so that they can be successful.

We will ultimately be judged at the end of the day for whether or not our student achievement increases, and we are fully committed to seeing those results.

I appreciate this opportunity to be here with you this morning, and I look forward to your questions and our conversation. Thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Gist. Mr. Lew.

TESTIMONY OF ALLEN Y. LEW,[1] EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FACILITIES MODERNIZATION, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. LEW. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. For the record, my name is Allen Lew. I am the Executive Director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization. Our office was established by the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007. It is responsible for the maintenance and repair of existing DC Public Schools, as well as rehabilitation and construction of schools and facilities and the development of a revised Master Plan for the system.

In the past several months, we have been engaged in a number of initiatives aimed at addressing quality-of-life issues necessary to support a classroom and school environment that is conducive to learning. These initiatives, including athletic field renovations, a Summer Blitz program, targeted roof repair programs, and fire and health code abatement, as well as a system-wide heating system maintenance program—concentrated on the most glaring deficiencies affecting the school facilities when the mayor took over the system. I am pleased to report that we have successfully implemented each of these urgent-need projects.

At the same time, I am proud to say that we also have been able to undertake significant management reforms since I last appeared before this Subcommittee, while also preparing for major construction initiatives this spring and summer.

In terms of organizational reforms, we set up an office—literally from scratch—to manage the summer blitz and targeted repair programs and the athletic field renovations that I just mentioned. We have drafted and published new procurement regulations. We have drafted new personnel regulations. We have competitively procured a program management team that provides roughly 22 FTEs to augment our school construction and facilities maintenance and staff, we have assumed responsibility for school maintenance functions. We have engaged a management consultant to develop state-of-the-art procurement, human resources, and information management systems, and we have begun the process of transitioning former DCPS OFM personnel into our office.

On the school modernization side, we have worked to change the former culture of project management at the school system and in some cases, construction management teams for certain projects have been terminated. For instance, at the Savoy School, the contractor, the builder, was terminated for the construction phase.

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Lew appears in the Appendix on page 88.

All of our renovation and new construction project budgets are being reviewed, and they are being "right-sized" to more accurately reflect what we expect to be actual costs. In the past, the cost estimates in the budgets were based to be simply square footage and had no relationship to real needs or to the conditions of the schools. We are correcting that now.

We currently have approximately 20 major construction projects that are in various stages of design, preconstruction, and construction that are moving forward expeditiously. As we move forward with these projects, we are reassessing the minimum quality standards for school buildings. We have found that some of the existing standards do not reflect the need for durability, maintenance, and life cycle of finishes, for example, of a school facility, and that this ultimately could affect the long-term cost and short-term labor requirements to maintain these new and renovated schools. One advantage of OPEFM being responsible for maintenance as well as construction is that we are considering what it takes to maintain buildings, not just to build the buildings early in our planning and design process.

On the topic of maintenance, through the various repair programs we initiated this past summer and fall, we substantially reduced the backlog of work orders at about 70 schools. We are currently in the process of clearing the remaining work orders throughout the system. We also are initiating a stabilization program, where the 60 or 70 schools that were not really participants in the programs this past summer are going to be receiving upgrades and repairs. As part of this, we are establishing a triage system so that when new repair orders come in, they will be addressed more quickly and efficiently. Emergency repairs will be addressed right away. Routine maintenance type repairs will be integrated into possibly a larger effort when the classrooms are not being disrupted by our work crews.

We have also initiated an air conditioning program. We have discovered that many of the classrooms actually did not have air conditioning. It was not a question of repairing the air conditioners. There was just absolutely no air conditioning. So we are in the process right now of getting all of the central AC systems running properly, as well as ensuring that air conditioning units in the classrooms are installed where necessary. One of the main hurdles right now relates to the fact that the schools have inadequate electrical capacity in many instances. So we have to actually upgrade the electrical systems before even installing the air conditioners.

Our goal is to get the new classroom air conditioning up and running by late spring. In some cases, we are going to have to rely on some temporary systems. We did that with the heating program a few months ago. About seven or eight schools required temporary boilers that were brought in to provide heat until the permanent system was repaired. And we are going to be doing the same thing with the air conditioning systems in some of the schools this spring. There are about 10 or 12 that will require temporary chillers, and we are going to have to provide some temporary electrical upgrades that would allow us to power up the systems.

On the larger modernization initiative, we are working with the deputy mayor of education and the chancellor to refine school/grade

configurations across the system, prioritize facility delivery, and identify systemic efficiencies that will allow us to move more students into new and modernized school buildings faster. In addition to the data used to develop the educational specifications for the chancellor's school consolidation plan, much of the data developed in the 2006 Master Facilities Plan are still relevant to our modernization efforts. We also found that the facility assessments—the information that was prepared during the past Administration as part of the master plan process was extremely helpful to us in our effort to deal with the heating and the electrical problems in the system as we move forward with the stabilization efforts. Right now we also are going through a major effort to reassess the construction formula that was implemented as part of their master plan by our predecessors to determine whether to build new schools or restore or expand existing schools and the logic behind the decisions that were made in the past. Having analyzed that formula, we are working now to find a balance that will result in a more effective and efficient combination of rehabilitation and new construction for the revised Facilities Master Plan. Ultimately, we think this will allow us to modernize quicker and address the long-term needs sooner, and as well as possibly reducing the capital expenditures over the course of 10 or 15 years.

I am excited to be working with the mayor, deputy mayor, and the chancellor, as well as the State superintendent, to implement these reforms. If there are any questions, I am more than pleased to take them. Thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Lew.

Mr. Reinoso, under the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, when a school is failing, parents, teachers, the community, and the administrators come together and develop a strategic plan to improve that one school. When a system of schools is failing, don't you think a similar plan should be put together that addresses reforms for the entire education system?

Mr. REINOSO. You are saying should there be a comprehensive plan for the education system?

Senator AKAKA. Yes.

Mr. REINOSO. I think the answer to that is yes, and I think the question is where are we looking for that plan. If you look at the State level, there is a State plan—which in DC is another way of saying city-wide plan—that is being developed around accountability and around the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, by the State superintendent. If you look at the local school level, in addition to work that is being done by the charter schools, our largest local education agency, led by Chancellor Rhee, is developing its own comprehensive plan to address both underperforming schools, to meet the requirements of NCLB, but also to provide a compelling and comprehensive public education option to all of the residents of the District of Columbia.

So I think, again, the answer is yes, there should be a plan, and I would argue that there is a plan. The Chancellor has a comprehensive plan for DCPS that she is developing over 5 years where people will be able to see the metrics, the benchmarks, and the specific focus areas year after year, and as the Superintendent mentioned, she is working on a 5-year plan where, again, there will

be laid out clear, transparent metrics and goals for year after year after year. And then my office will ensure that they have the resources necessary to execute their plans, and also that there is the necessary accountability.

As they lay out their metrics, we will be trying to stay ahead of the public in terms of holding them accountable because the public will then hold the mayor accountable for whether or not they met their goals.

Senator AKAKA. Well, without question, the testimony and statements given this morning by this team demonstrates a strategy for reforms. But can you tell me how you are communicating that plan to the education community? And what are you doing to incorporate constructive feedback? You touched on that, but can you be more specific?

Mr. REINOSO. Sure. The chancellor is developing her plan, and then I think once there is a firmed-up document, she will be engaged in a fairly broad effort to communicate her priorities to the community. With your permission, if you want to ask for the specifics of the engagement strategy that she intends to pursue, by all means do so. The superintendent will also be conveying her plan, and there has already been, I think, community involvement to some extent in both conversations. And so throughout this time, throughout these 15 months, and even prior to that, during the campaign, all of us and the mayor have collected a tremendous amount of information of what the community needs and expectations are for the school system, and we are incorporating that in these drafts, which will then go out to the public in a very transparent way, at which point we will get additional feedback.

With Mr. Lew's plan, likewise, we are working on developing a new Master Facilities Plan and there will be a community engagement process as part of that. And so at the high level of the plans, there is community engagement, and then in the execution, there is also community engagement. Just as an example, there was a tremendous amount of engagement around the school consolidation proposals the chancellor put forward. Nest week, we are beginning a series of community meetings around the next step in this process—the reuse of those school facilities—so there will also be opportunities for folks to provide comment as we move forward on that strand of work. And, similarly, the chancellor has held meetings around her restructuring proposals. There will be community engagement around the principal selection effort that she is engaging on. And Mr. Lew has met with a number of communities around individual specific facilities projects.

So, again, I think you can tease these opportunities for engagement out at various levels, but there is engagement in the process. And in terms of communicating the big-picture priorities, the mayor first at the 100-day point in his Administration communicated a set of priorities, and then at the beginning of this year he also communicated an expanded set of priorities around education that highlighted aspects of both the State superintendent's efforts and the chancellor's efforts. So I think folks have multiple ways of knowing what we are working on and then commenting on individual pieces of it as they evolve in their implementation.

Senator AKAKA. Well, I believe transparency—and this is what I am talking about—is so important, especially for the people you are serving so they understand what it is you are trying to do. And my purpose in having this hearing this morning and the one that we had previously was really to bring not only to the DC community but also the congressional community information about what you are doing and how you are doing it. And this is very important to gain support, and for me now, I have extended it to not only DC and Congress, but the rest of the country——

Mr. REINOSO. That is right.

Senator AKAKA [continuing]. Is looking at DC and what DC is doing to reform the system. So it is very important that we have a process for transparency here.

Let me ask the chancellor, the superintendent, and Mr. Lew, the question that I asked Mr. Reinoso: How are you communicating your plans to those affected by the reforms? And what are you doing to incorporate constructive feedback? I am glad to hear from some of you the word "partnership" and trying to work other groups in as well. But how are you communicating your plans, chancellor?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. If you look at some of the major reforms that we are putting in place right now around, for example, right-sizing the District, so school closures and consolidations, the school restructurings, the principal hirings, in each of those circumstances we have very specific plans about how we are going to engage the community more broadly in that. An example of that is around the school closings. In November, we came out with what our tentative recommendations were for right-sizing the District as well as the creation of new programs. We then embarked on about 10 weeks of community meetings and every night went out, talked to the different communities. And it was interesting to me because throughout that process, people often would come to those meetings and say, "Well, you have already made up your mind. We do not really believe that you are listening to us. And so we think that this is sort of a farce."

And I would say to them, "Well, if I had already decided which schools would be closed, I would have had the mayor sign that executive order the following day, and I would have saved myself several months of getting yelled at every single night. My focus here is to really listen to what people have to say."

And at the end of that process, we did make a significant number of modifications to our original plan. And it was interesting for me to sort of then circle back with the people who we had engaged in conversations with and to really hear people—a lot of people say, "You know what? We didn't really think that you were listening, but now when we see what you have finally recommended to the mayor, we know that you were."

I think this is hard because some people who had a lot things to say and maybe we did not make the decision that they would have liked, they said, "Well, you weren't listening." But for me, it is about—I cannot as a leader do everything that everybody wants me to do. My job as a leader is to make sure that I am hearing all of those voices, taking into consideration all those things, but

in the end making the decisions that I think are going to enable us to move this District forward in the most effective way.

I do anticipate that we are going to have a lot of community involvement in the school restructurings as well. We have 27 schools right now that are in restructuring status. According to NCLB, all of those 27 schools will require a significant intervention before the next school year begins. We will have to be implementing those. So we have already begun that process. We have met individually with each principal, with each staff, with each parent group, what we call our Local School Restructuring Teams, LSRTs, and then more broadly with the community. We have done that already to explain NCLB and the mandates, etc., and then we will be engaging in further processes over the next few weeks as we are deciding finally which options we are choosing for which schools.

Senator AKAKA. Superintendent Gist.

Ms. GIST. Yes, we actually started our engagement efforts last summer when we were preparing for our transition, and the first document that we needed to get prepared was that transition plan that I mentioned in my testimony. And we engaged the public very extensively in the development of that plan and multiple drafts of that plan, which culminated in a large public event where we got extensive feedback on that final draft prior to presenting it to the mayor. And we have used that plan, which outlined our five policy priorities, we have used that plan as well as a number of other plans that are existing in the city. And I think that is also a really important point, that this team is not the first team that has come together to develop some plans for the District of Columbia. There are a number of plans in particular that we have used to inform our work right now, and one of those is the Master Education Plan that was developed with extensive community engagement. And so I think it is important to use what has been done before.

In addition, Mayor Fenty walked throughout this entire city over many months, listening to the public, and used that experience and what he heard from the public to develop his initial education framework when he was first inaugurated a little over a year ago. And we have used those goals and priorities in the development of our plan as well.

We currently have a framework, and I talked about the four main goals of that framework in my testimony. And we are using that framework that is actually up on our website right now. We are coordinating, listening to see what feedback people are giving us about that, and we will have a walk-around document for our plan at the end of this month, which we will begin to use to engage the public.

In addition to that, our office has the unique opportunity of having the State Board of Education, which includes appointed but also publicly elected members, and so we have the opportunity to take advantage of the public engagement through the responsibilities at that State Board of Education in their public meetings as well as in their meetings within the parts of the city that they represent.

We also have a number of other groups—the State Advisory Panel on Special Education, for example—that can help to advise us with specific parts of our plan. And so those are some of the

things that we are doing to engage the public in our planning processes.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. Mr. Lew.

Mr. LEW. Yes, we have been meeting with different groups at various different levels, sometimes on particular school projects, and other times on larger issues. We have also been meeting with the business sector and the relevant trade groups. We have also had meetings with contractors and workers. And we also set up a website where much of the information that we share with the Council or even the information we also would share with Congress, we would have on the website so people can access it and see for themselves.

So we really do believe in public input. I think I have made it very clear that if we are not building schools that are responsive to the community and to the schools and to the families, then why are we doing this? There really isn't any reason to go and just rebuild schools for the sake of rebuilding schools.

So it is important that we are responsive to the needs, and I believe the transparency helps alleviate a lot of the anxieties. When many of us—Victor, Michelle, and I, and I think Deborah Gist, when we go to meetings, at least a few months ago, it is almost like a hanging trial or something. We walk in and before we can say the first word, some of the people are angry already. And I believe we are helping arrest that. The anger and the frustration is mostly caused by years and years of disappointments and broken promises. And I think the team that has been assembled by the mayor is very responsive to the needs of the city and its children. And I believe in a very short time we have actually demonstrated some measurable progress.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you. That particular question of transparency was about informing the people you are working with and also the feedback is listening to how they think about what you are doing.

Ms. Ashby, what is your reaction to Mr. Reinoso's response to the question about strategic plans?

Ms. ASHBY. Well, everything that has been said by Mr. Reinoso and the other panelists here certainly is true. They each are working on their own plans, or they are working on revising plans that pre-existed before they took over various aspects of the school system.

However, what we are talking about when we say a long-term District-wide education strategic plan, we are talking about something different. We are talking about—I think the word "comprehensive" was used earlier. Certainly comprehensive, but something that covers education in the District as an entity, as a whole. And none of these efforts by themselves do that.

In fact, one of the things that the reform effort did was to separate the local education agency, Ms. Rhee's DCPS, from the State level, which a good deal of that responds to criticisms and concerns from the U.S. Department of Education in terms of handling Federal grants. But in separating the functions, we now have a need to integrate them because they are part of a whole. And in a number of States, States have strategic plans for education. The State of Hawaii is one that has a very comprehensive plan that would

include all the elements that experts say one should include in the strategic plan.

And it is interesting because one of the reasons for doing that is to provide a road map, not only for people involved in the system currently trying to bring about change and improve the system, but a road map for people outside of the system—stakeholders, parents, teachers, students—well, students and teachers are inside the system. But those who are outside the system, the Congress, DC Council, for them to ultimately know where things are going.

Now, we are not saying that we would have expected in 6 months for this team to have put together such a plan. But we are concerned that maybe they do not have an intention of ever putting together one. The things they are doing in terms of looking at the particular areas and discussing things and talking among themselves and what Mr. Reinoso is doing is all great, very valuable. It is what would be needed to develop a District-wide education strategic plan. But also part of that is to bring in stakeholders outside of the immediate team, not just to comment on decisions made or not just to hear about plans, but to be at the ground level helping to develop those plans. And that is one of the advantages of having a strategic plan.

One could even argue that before you would want to finalize a DCPS plan or a State-level plan, you would want to have your overarching plan and that those plans would be sub-plans that would buy into the goals and objectives and time frames and so forth.

So there is no recipe here for what needs to go in the plan particularly. There are certain things that need to be covered in terms of goals, objectives, time frames, but it is something that is missing. And as I said, we believe that what has been done has really been valuable and everyone seems to be on the right path, but we are concerned that maybe that path is not going to lead to an overarching plan.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you for that, because from what I have been reading, it appears that GAO has been, I will use the word, "insisting" on a long-term strategic plan. And I look upon what the team is doing as an immediate or short-term move towards improving the system and developing a long-term strategic plan.

So let me ask the chancellor, would you care to respond to that answer?

Ms. RHEE. I would. I would say that part of the problem in public education today is that we have a whole lot of plans and not enough execution. And I would say that—who would be the audience for this plan? If we created the 100-, 200-page plan, in the end who would end up reading this plan and where would it go? Because when I walked into office in June, I came into an office that had binders and binders of strategic plans that consultants came in and literally none of these things had been executed. I would argue that what needs to happen in the District of Columbia today to improve public education is that we are taking a much more sort of active approach, that instead of taking the time of incredibly valuable people and staff to create a plan that will sit on a shelf somewhere, that we engage in what we are doing right now. This team

meets together at least once a week, and we talk through very specific issues at the school level, even to the extent of the student level.

For example, the other week we found that there was one elementary school student in one of our schools who had missed all of January, unexcused absence. We immediately got on the phone. The deputy mayor's office was activating CFSA, a number of other agencies, and together we actually found the child. We had MPD go out with us to the home, talk to the parents, came up with a plan.

This is the kind of action that is necessary to make sure that no child falls through the cracks and that we are actually doing the right thing. And I would say that our energy and our time has to be spent doing real work as opposed to creating the plans because I think that if you look broadly, there are lots of strategic plans out there, and I don't think that is what is needed in the District today.

I certainly think that one of the things that we could do is once the Master Facilities Plan, the State superintendent's 5-year plan, and my plan are all put together, that we could have some kind of a document that sort of outlines how all these things fit together. But I think to engage in a 5-year planning process overall for the District separately is probably not, in my opinion, the best use of time.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Rhee, let me ask you a question about the school consolidation plan.

Ms. RHEE. Yes. Are you going to yell at me, too?

Senator AKAKA. For those losing their schools, what are you doing to address the concerns of parents and students about the school closings in their neighborhoods? Can you respond to that?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. The first thing that we did was we engaged in a very significant communication effort where we held multiple meetings for each school that was proposed to be closed to get feedback and the idea of what concerns and issues existed in the community. We heard those concerns and then made modifications based on that. Now that we have made the final decisions about which schools will be closed, we are engaging in a process where we will create a transition plan for each and every school separately. That plan will be created with the staff and the school community to make sure that issues of safety, transportation, staffing, etc., will all be addressed within those plans.

I am very happy to say that we, in working through our budget for the 2008–09 school year, are already seeing the benefits of the right-sizing. Two, what we are going to be able to do to the schools, we will have many more resources available to the schools. We will be able in the schools that are impacted, with the students who are impacted by the closings, those are the schools that will have the comprehensive staffing model in place, which includes additional academic supports like literacy coaches and numerary coaches. We will have wellness support such as social workers, guidance counselors, and psychologists at those schools, and enrichment supports, so music, arts, and PE teachers. And I think that in collaboration with Allen Lew's office and the facility upgrades that we will see in those receiving schools, that every family who is impacted by the

school closings will see that they are in a school that is much better resources and staffed for the fall.

Senator AKAKA. Of all of that you have said in your statement as well as your responses, what are the top program initiatives for next year? And how do you see those aligning with the AYP, average yearly progress, requirements under No Child Left Behind?

Ms. RHEE. Absolutely. So I would say the first initiative that we have that we believe will have a significant impact on that is the comprehensive staffing every single school across the District should have in terms of resources because right now across the District that is very inconsistent, the level of staffing that schools have. So we are going to be implementing this model, the staffing model, eventually across the District, but initially within this first year at the schools that are the receiving schools for these students.

Because the comprehensive staffing model has things like the literacy coach, the numerary coach, and a number of other academic supports in it, we truly believe that what this will do is allow the schools to have the additional resources necessary to make the improvements so that they can meet AYP moving forward.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Gist, would you want to respond to the question about strategic plans, also?

Ms. GIST. Yes, I definitely would. Thank you, Senator. I actually agree with Ms. Ashby about the importance of thinking long term about where are we going with these reforms efforts. And I know our team does. I definitely also agree with Chancellor Rhee that at the end of the day, what really matters are the results that we get. And I think that I want to emphasize that the plan that the Office of the State Superintendent is putting together is a District-wide plan. Hawaii is actually a very good example because you have State responsibilities in Hawaii that you have in one large school district. And the Office of the State Superintendent's plan, which, again, is being developed using all the plans that have been developed over the past, as well as current community engagement, includes early childhood, it includes pre-K through 12, which includes DCPS as well as the charter schools. It also includes adult education and to some extent higher education, and our college access responsibilities.

So I do think that a plan is necessary, but I think that the plan that we are developing is one that does tie these responsibilities together.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Reinoso, I am impressed by the work that you are doing with the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission. As you know, H.R. 2080 amended the DC Charter to lay out clear accountability mechanisms for the DC Department of Education. As part of the ICSIC, other agencies such as the Child and Family Services Administration also work to help improve the educational success of students.

Since these agencies are not covered by H.R. 2080, how are they being held accountable?

Mr. REINOSO. Thank you for that question, Senator. The work of the Interagency Commission has been structured around six goals: That children are ready for school, that children and youth succeed in school, that children and youth are healthy and practice healthy

behaviors, that they engage in meaningful activities, that they live in healthy, stable, and supportive families, and that they make a successful transition to adulthood.

We have taken each of those goals and identified key indicators for the city's performance in meeting those goals, and each month the commission gets together to discuss our performance around one goal. And so we have cycled through all six goals once, and at each point we have identified gaps in our performance and laid out short-term as well as longer-term interagency initiatives that we think are critical to improving the city's performance against the indicators for the respective goals. And added to that basic process is that in some cases a situation requires immediate intervention, in which case we have scheduled separate or follow-up Cap Stats to review performance and initiatives around a specific agency's efforts to address that situation. In other cases, we have identified initiatives that are critical but not as time sensitive that we will not revisit until we come back to the goal its connected to.

So for example, for goal one, when we talked about making sure children are ready for school, one of the things that was evident from the onset was that we did not have any comprehensive mechanism for assessing whether children were ready for school. And so we then embarked on a process that included a number of agencies, including the Department of Health, the State Superintendent's Office, and the Department of Human Services, to try to determine how we could best address that. And again, as I mentioned before, we are now ready to pilot a school preparedness assessment later in the spring.

In other areas where there are crises, for example, the terrible situation we had with the Banita Jacks case, the mother who now is accused of murdering her four children, the ICSIC got together around that to do a sort of step-by-step review, reviewing all of the places where this family interacted with an agency to identify where there were missteps or where there could have been other efforts to support the family and to avoid them falling through the cracks. And we have since developed a number of initiatives that reflect reform opportunities that were made plain by that case. And that is also one of the mechanisms by which we are holding the agencies accountable through ICSIC.

Finally, I think that one of the somewhat intangible but I think critical benefits that has come out of the commission is that there was a real distance in the past between these agencies and the education agencies. And I would say even more than distance, there was sometimes antagonism between these agencies. And now as a result of this process, the agencies are volunteering ideas of how they could provide support to the chancellor or to the State superintendent, and likewise, the education agencies are providing ideas to the other youth- and family-serving agencies about ways that they might help with something that one of the agencies is undertaking.

And so, again, I think as those working relationships continue to improve, as we continue to hold agencies accountable through the monthly commission meetings and the affiliated meetings, we are going to see a lot more activity and a lot more innovation in the District in terms of supporting the whole child and the family. And

while those kinds of supports are not part of the interventions in the No Child Left Behind Act, I think that we will see that they will have a significant positive effect on our academic performance as a city.

Senator AKAKA. Ms. Ashby, do you have a response?

Ms. ASHBY. I actually wanted to move back to strategic planning, if that is OK, briefly.

Senator AKAKA. That is fine.

Ms. ASHBY. I wanted to make two points. First of all, as I said earlier, we are in no way trying to say anything negative about the actions that have taken place. Of course, a plan that is not implemented is no good, and we know that developing a plan for the sake of developing a plan and putting it on a bookshelf is useless. So we agree with Ms. Rhee that, of course, a plan has to be implemented and there has to be activity. And there has been a lot of action and activity, and we applaud it.

The second point has to do with whether or not the State superintendent's strategic plan is the type of plan we envision, and in discussions with Mr. Reinoso, we have been led to believe that it is something else. But if that is the case, because, as you know, you have asked us to take a longer-term look at what is going on with the reform, and over the next several months, if it unfolds that the plan is the type of plan that we envision in our recommendation, we certainly will be able to tell you that in the future.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you.

Chancellor Rhee, I would like a response to what she said. I know that GAO has been moving towards a comprehensive long-term strategic plan. From what we have heard from you, you have been dealing with today's challenges to try to fix the system so that you will be ready to set a solid base so you can begin to build on it. And what we are asking about is, are you moving to those long-term strategic plans also. So if you would respond to that at this point, and then I have another one on human capital, but respond to that.

Ms. RHEE. Sure. And I think that what you will see is that within the next few months, and certainly before next school year begins, you will have a comprehensive 5-year strategic plan from the District, and ours will actually be a little bit different because we are using as our base the Master Education Plan that was in place and has been developed over a significant amount of time by the community. And so our strategic plan is really sort of the implementation plan around that Master Education Plan. But it is a long-term plan. The State superintendent is also planning on creating a 5-year plan, and then the Master Facility Plan that Mr. Lew is creating is actually longer than 5 years.

So I think that what you will be seeing over the next few months is absolutely that longer-term thinking. I think that what we want to communicate about this is that I do not think in any jurisdiction outside of a State plan and District plans that you have another plan then layered on top of that. I just do not know what the purpose of that would be or what information would be included in that plan that would not be articulated in the plans that we are going to create. But I do think that one thing that we can do is to sit down with GAO to lay out what will be sort of the substance

of each of our plans, and I am very confident that what folks will find is that we are taking a very long-term view to overall what is happening in education in the city.

Senator AKAKA. Does anyone else on the team want to make any comments on that? Mr. Lew.

Mr. LEW. Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to echo what Chancellor Rhee said. We have been putting out fires for the last 6 to 9 months. I kind of draw an analogy between someone gets hit by a car: Do you call the emergency EMS or do you sit down and discuss with the injured person whether it should be a Blue Cross Blue Shield plan or should it be Care First or something? And I think we are now getting to the point where we are above water, and we can focus on the need for long-term planning. And I think much of this is coming together. Certainly as a group, I think, we are going to continue to be interested in implementation, though, because we know the failures of the past. Many of us have been given reams and reams of loose-leafs of plans, plans and more plans. And we found that true when we go through these plans. Many of the plans have made sound assumptions. So, even when my office was asked to revise the Master Plan for School Facilities, it was not really a wholesale revision. Much of the information that was gathered previously was rational and sound. And we are adapting much of it, and we are updating it. However, some of the plans that were submitted in the past were rejected by the Council, or rejected by the chief financial officer because they were not affordable. So we are addressing cost constraints which is a major, significant issue. We're asking ourselves: How do you present a plan that is not affordable? How do you present a plan that does not coincide with the needs of the system?

The chancellor has asked whether we can implement the Facilities Plan sooner than later, and so we are trying to address the concerns of the children, but also the realities. What can the District afford? So I believe that in the not too distant future, in a few months, we will be able to produce some plans that will reflect on not only the political realities but also the financial capacities of the District of Columbia.

Senator AKAKA. Chancellor Rhee, we deal with human capital issues on this Subcommittee all the time, and that is a huge challenge for us in our country. And we know how hard it is to attract and retain talented employees.

As you restructure the personnel at the central office, what performance benchmarks and incentives are being put into place?

Ms. RHEE. So this is a topic that is very near and dear to me. I spent 10 years prior to coming into this position as the CEO of the New Teacher Project, which was an organization that was solely dedicated to improving the human capital in urban school districts across the country.

I am a firm believer that we can have great new sparkly buildings, we can have all the most wonderful curricula out there; but unless we have great people working in our school system, it will all be for naught. So, in many ways, our significant focus is on ensuring that our human capital needs are being met.

I feel a tremendous amount of confidence around this right now on multiple levels. First, obviously, the personnel legislation that

City Council passed will allow us to begin tackling this issue at the central office and will allow us to ensure that we have a system of accountability and a culture of accountability at the central office first. Already what we have seen is that through the month of January, we completed performance evaluations on every central office employee that we have. That had not happened for the prior 5 years. And we put in place individual benchmarks for a number of our departments. We have department-level scorecards, and we have an organizing function that is similar to the mayor's CAP Stat program that we call "School Stat." And so we are looking on a weekly basis department by department at whether or not departments are on track to meeting their goals. We are happy to provide more information along those lines.

We started something very important, in December I believe, in what we are calling the TEAM Awards. We identified criteria where we said that we wanted to identify schools that had seen the most significant student achievement gains last year. Those were schools that would have had more than 20 percentage points gains in reading and math separately. There were three District schools that fell under this criteria. We used a grant that we had gotten from the Federal Government, from the U.S. Department of Education, to give significant awards to these teachers and the school staff. We actually gave $8,000 to each teacher in the building, $4,000 to every ancillary teacher, like counselors, librarians, etc. And we also gave $2,000 to every custodian and clerical worker.

We thought this was incredibly important for multiple reasons, but I will add that though the Federal Government funds did not allow us to give the awards to the non-instructional staff, we actually found the money to do that because when you have this kind of wholesale reform going on in a school, it is because every adult is engaged in the process.

We got tremendous feedback from the unions, from the rank-and-file teachers, from all folks, about this program. People came to us and asked us whether we would continue it on for next year. They asked us if we could expand the program to include more schools. So we are working diligently with our union leadership right now to make sure that this program can grow and that we can see it next year and that we can ultimately get to the level where we are awarding teachers based on the classroom level achievements as well.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Ms. Gist, to continue along the discussion of teacher quality, you mentioned the OSSE is developing a teacher quality strategy to bring in high-quality teachers. The chancellor also testified that DCPS is working on hiring qualified teachers. Can you explain how OSSE and DCPS are working together on this?

Ms. GIST. Yes, definitely. Our responsibility when it comes to teacher quality is to set the right policy conditions for all of our LEAs, but it particularly affects DCPS's ability to be able to recruit and retain the highest-quality teachers. And so it is not our responsibility to make those selections or to directly get involved with that effort but, rather, to support and to provide the right conditions so that DCPS can be successful.

And so, for example, one of the things that we are working on right now, in addition to our highly qualified teacher definition, our teacher certification requirements right now, on the highly qualified teacher definition, the definition that we use in the District of Columbia is so much stronger than the requirements that are in No Child Left Behind that it actually prevents our schools from being able to oftentimes bring on people that are genuinely highly qualified; but because of the way that our regulation is written, it means that on paper they are not highly qualified, which oftentimes can result even in the school district not being able to fill a position, meaning that rather than having someone who is genuinely highly qualified, a classroom may end up with a permanent substitute for that year. And I think you would agree with me that was certainly not the intention of the highly qualified provision within No Child Left Behind.

On teacher certification, we do not have any specific proposals in place right now, but what we are doing is working with our State Board of Education, DCPS, and many policymakers and other partners across the country but really certainly within our community, to think about what do our teacher certification requirements need to have in order to do two things: One, to make sure that we have a pool of qualified people that is broad enough for our schools to be able to choose among in a way that allows them to be very selective, but not limiting that pool so that their selectivity means that they do not come out with the quantity of teachers that they need because we are somehow overly restrictive on the front end.

But then the second thing is also to ensure that we are focusing at the end of the day on teacher effectiveness. So frequently we talk about teacher quality, meaning requirements on paper or certain items that are checked on a form, when really what we need are effective teachers who can help our children to be successful.

Senator AKAKA. Well, the question I asked before and I will ask you, since you are talking about recruiting, what is the biggest challenge to attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and staff that you face?

Ms. GIST. Well, I would actually defer that question to the chancellor with your approval, since that recruitment piece fits into her role.

Senator AKAKA. Chancellor Rhee.

Ms. RHEE. What research across the country has shown is that one of the things that school districts can do to ensure that the most qualified people are matriculating into the District is early hiring. If you look at the teacher candidate pool that exists, the highest quality candidates are looking for jobs early, and they want to know what they are doing for the following year early.

So if a district is waiting until August or September to fill their vacancies, they are going to undoubtedly be left with people who do not have other options, and typically those are not the most highly qualified candidates.

So what we as a district are trying to do is ensure that we are setting up a process so that we can hire our teachers early when the best quality teachers are still available and in the pool. That is part of the reason why we moved as expeditiously as we did towards the school consolidation process, because we knew that if we

waited until summer to have that happen, then all of the movement of the incumbent teachers would not happen until after that. Then we would not be able to place new teachers.

If you look, interestingly enough, people who are interested in teaching in urban districts, they are not necessarily in it for—I mean, they know what they are getting into. And so what we want to do is make sure that they are being hired early. We also want to create the right conditions and the culture.

I think we are in a very fortunate position right now as a city and as DCPS, in that we have gotten a tremendous amount of national attention on the efforts that we have going on. So we have been inundated with applications for all kinds of positions. As I said in my testimony, we have had over 500 applications for principal positions, and they are still rolling in every day. We will end up hiring, I think, a maximum of 50 principals, probably fewer. So we are talking about at the very least an application to vacancy ratio of about 10:1, which is a position that most districts are not in. It will allow us to be incredibly selective about who is coming in, and that is exactly the position that we want to be in.

Senator AKAKA. Let me mention and suggest something here.

Ms. RHEE. Sure.

Senator AKAKA. It is close to my heart, and I have found it to be very important. And you used the word, and it is what brought it to mind. You used the word "culture." In education, whoever teaches in that particular school, that district, or that States should be aware of the culture of that place because through that culture you can probably reach the child faster and better and with good understanding and relationship than if they did not.

Ms. RHEE. Absolutely.

Senator AKAKA. And I remember when I was in elementary school in Hawaii when we had books that talked about snow, I used to wonder, "Why are we reading these books?" But that is the kind of books they had in those days. But it was out of our culture.

So that word you use is very important in the selection of those that you are looking for.

Ms. RHEE. That is absolutely important. I think one of the mistakes that public education, particularly urban public education, has made over the last couple of decades is assuming that teachers or educators are interchangeable widgets and that you can move one from one school to the other school and it does not really matter, when, in fact, it matters a tremendous amount.

What we need to do is make sure that as we are hiring people into schools, that they are a good fit for that particular school and for the culture, because we have schools across this District that have very different cultures, very different environments. And there are some educators that would work extraordinarily well in some of them, but not particularly well in others. So what we want to do is make sure we have a much more robust selection process in place where, if you do this early, if you can hire early, you can do this, where people are going out to the schools, they are doing sample teaching lessons actually at the schools. That is the level that we want to get to so that people are visiting the actual schools that they might be teaching or working in so that they can determine whether or not that is the right fit for them. And we can do

a tremendous amount from the District side of educating people about the culture that they are going to enter into.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you very much for that.

My final question will be to Ms. Ashby, but before that, let me ask a question of Mr. Lew. When you were last before the Subcommittee, the Summer Blitz program to improve school infrastructure targeted 70 schools at that time. Can you give us a status update of the number of work orders closed and the number of outstanding work orders there are?

Mr. LEW. Yes. Approximately, at the time when we began this effort, there was about 11,000 or so outstanding work orders. And we learned when we went through this process that there were probably as many work orders that were unaccounted for, never submitted to the school system to execute because of the way work orders are handled. Many of them were never responded to for years. So teachers and principals and vice principals started basically not responding—not submitting work orders.

We learned that oftentimes, when you go through buildings, when they said there were 20 lights that did not work, when you go through the buildings after years have gone by, there is 10 times or double the amount of problems that existed.

So we eliminated about 10,000 work orders, cleared about 10,000, but during that same period we gained about another 7,000. We added another 7,000 to the roster.

So it is an ongoing process. We think that our effort in the next few months is to clear this away, to get it to the point where it is zero. And then at that point I think we will establish a new culture in terms of responding to work orders and treating it in a totally different manner so that we will then be in a position where we will have dozens and dozens of trade contractors already on board, retained, so when a problem comes up with plumbing or electrical, these contractors are already on board with us, and they will be assigned that school year to address those problems; whereas, in the past, I think the school system had to then go out and do a procurement and then they had to find the money, and it was just an impossible bureaucratic nightmare.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ashby, you and I have heard the team and where they are presently, what they have done, what they have been trying to do, what they intend to do, their expectations, directly from the team. I want to praised and commend the mayor and all of you, the mayor in particular for his deep commitment, because what you have done would not have happened without the commitment of the mayor as well as the council and others who have to make these decisions. And you have carried out many things that had to be reformed, and you are still in the process of reforming.

So, Ms. Ashby, the first GAO person who has come forth with a report that I requested on the DC Public School system and your recommendations as to what you think needs to be done, and based on your short-term study, do you think the progress of the initial management reforms made by the mayor's education team have established the appropriate foundation to meet their intended goals?

Ms. ASHBY. I do, Mr. Chairman. As I said earlier, I applaud their efforts. A lot has been done in a short period of time. We were in

a situation, a crisis situation in the District of Columbia Public Schools, and they have tackled some of the critical management issues and other issues, done things that needed to be done and long have been needed to have been done. So I think they have done an outstanding job thus far.

Of course, the real test is what happens with the children and their achievement levels, and that is long term. Things are not going to turn around overnight. We hope to see incremental progress, which I am encouraged that we will. But that is the true test. And I think also that in order to be successful, you are operating in a political environment, particularly in the District of Columbia because of the Federal role as well as the local culture, as we have talked about. And not to beat a dead horse, as they say, but to the extent that plans are transparent early rather than later, and to the extent that the people affected by the plans and the people who can put up road blocks can be brought into the process early at the ground level to help shape those plans, I think this team is going to be more successful.

So I look forward to what is going to happen. I am a resident of the District of Columbia. I am a parent in the District of Columbia. And I am excited about what is going on.

Senator AKAKA. Well, Ms. Ashby, let me tell you, your remarks are heart-warming and encouraging as well, and we want to give this team all the help we can to bring about your expectations. And it is true, as GAO is pressing for a long-term strategic plan, it is like a goal that we are all working for. And, of course, simply, it is a better educated child.

Let me revert back to Hawaii. In Hawaii, I have the term "hanai keiki," and in the culture of Hawaii, there were no homeless because families took in children who did not have parents. They call it "the hanai system." And I am so glad to see that our country is coming about into this hanai system that has been used for indigenous people, centuries ago, years ago. But it is something that we need to restore, and so hanai keiki is to take care of the children, and this is what you are doing. And it is really great, and I want to encourage you to continue to do what you are doing and to keep us informed as to what you are doing. And I want to wish all of you well, and thank you so much for coming and responding and being a part of the help that this Subcommittee needs.

I should tell you we have a second panel that will follow you, but for now thank you so much for coming and contributing to this.

We have two that will be witnesses in our second panel: Jane Hannaway is the Director of the Education Policy Center of the Urban Institute; and John Hill is the Chief Executive Officer of the Federal City Council. I welcome both of you to this hearing. I am glad you were here to hear the statements and the responses of our first panel.

As you know, our Subcommittee requires that all witnesses testify under oath; therefore, I ask you to stand and take the oath. Do you swear that the testimony you are about to give the Subcommittee is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Ms. HANNAWAY. I do.

Mr. HILL. I do.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Let it be noted for the record that our witnesses answered in the affirmative.

Again, I welcome our second panel. Before we begin, I want you to know that although your oral statement is limited to 5 minutes, your full written statement will be included in the record.

So, Dr. Hannaway, please proceed with your statement.

TESTIMONY OF JANE HANNAWAY, PH.D.,[1] DIRECTOR, EDUCATION POLICY CENTER, URBAN INSTITUTE

Ms. HANNAWAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to comment on school reform in the District of Columbia. I am happy to share my thoughts, not only as a researcher who has been analyzing education reforms across the country for almost three decades, but also as a resident of the District of Columbia. I should make clear that the views I am expressing here are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

I agree with something you said earlier: Mayor Fenty should be applauded for his willingness to take responsibility for the schools and to provide a direct line of accountability.

But success in schools will take more than governance changes. Reforms, including accountability close to the classroom, I think are necessary for better student learning.

I work to stress two areas in my comments. The first is teacher quality and the second is data systems—both topics that came up with the earlier panel. I see these two areas as closely related in basic and practical ways, as I will explain.

I lead a national research center at the Urban Institute called CALDER. CALDER is a federally funded research center. It stands for National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research—a mouthful. We use administrative data such as the type that Superintendent Gist was discussing this morning. We use administrative data in a number of States, including North Carolina, Florida, Texas, and New York, where we have data at the individual student level, performance on individual students over a number of years, and are able to link students with their individual teachers. So it is a tremendously large and tremendously rich database that gives us insight into schools that we have never had before.

The findings emerging on teacher effectiveness are indeed stunning. While I think parents, principals, and other teachers have all known that teachers are important, it is the variation across teachers in effectiveness that has been stunning. And we are finding this across States, so this is not a one-State finding. I think this is something pretty basic.

The most effective teachers, just to give you some idea, those in the top 15 percentile, are getting about a year and a half gain per student on tested performance. Those in the bottom 15 percentile are getting about a half a year gain. Now, you can imagine how this cumulates over time and the consequences for a child of having one of these excellent teachers for a number of years in a row, and the consequences of having one of these poor teachers for a number

[1] The prepared statement of Ms. Hannaway appears in the Appendix on page 95.

of years in a row. One study, one of our studies, has shown that if disadvantaged students had these excellent teachers for 5 years in a row, we could essentially close the achievement gap. So these are very important findings.

The difficult tasks, therefore, for the District of Columbia policymakers and education administrators are: One, how to get more high-performing teachers in the classroom (especially in classrooms serving disadvantaged students); second, how to hold teachers and schools accountable for student performance; and, third, and importantly, how to do it fairly.

Now, the answers, I argue, are heavily dependent on good data systems. A big problem in education right now is that the standard measures of teacher quality that are built into our current hiring practices and pay schedules—such as certification status, years of experience—except for the first couple years—and master's degrees—unless it is in the subject area that you are teaching—do not distinguish more and less effective teachers.

Many efforts are underway. I think some of them were talked about here as plans in the District of Columbia. There are also a number of efforts underway across the country in various school districts and States to try to rethink how we identify, select, train, assign, and reward teachers.

Implementing teacher effectiveness reforms, however, cannot be implemented on a wish and a prayer or on a hunch. It is not fair to school professionals and, most importantly, it is not fair to students. Reforms that promote teacher effectiveness should be undertaken, but they should be guided by sound data systems so that good judgments can be made.

The important effort underway that Deborah Gist talked about this morning, the superintendent, is a $25 million investment by OSSE, by the Office of the State Superintendent, to develop a longitudinal administrative data system here in the District that would track students over time, that would link students with their teachers. I have been serving on the panel reviewing proposals to develop this system. We have just finished our initial review, and I am very hopeful about the quality of the data system that will develop. Administrative data systems cannot tell you everything, but they can tell you a lot.

Let me go to six specific recommendations that I might make, and this is all based on research findings.

First, the District should be open to teacher candidates coming with non-traditional teacher training backgrounds, such as the New Teacher Project that Chancellor Rhee led and founded, and Teach for America, as well as talented individuals in areas of shortage, such as math and science.

Second, to provide an intensive orientation and support structure, including feedback on the performance that teachers are getting from their students, for all teachers, regardless of background, for at least 2 years. We know that in those first 2 years, teachers become more effective. It tends to level off after that, but those first few years in the classroom are very rich times for learning, and we should have support for teachers at that point.

We should develop school, principal, and teacher performance incentive programs based on student learning gains, and I would stress gains.

We should develop differentiated pay schedules to attract the best teachers to the most challenging schools and talented individuals in shortage areas. Right now across this country, what we see is that there is a flow. When school districts hire teachers, they tend to be assigned more often than not to the most challenging schools, and they tend to leave. And when they leave, they go to the less challenging schools, leaving the toughest schools with continuing churning of new teachers. If we pay teachers more to be in these tougher assignments, we may be able to retain more there.

Another recommendation I would make is move the tenure decision out to 5 years. In the District right now, I believe it is 2 years. I think with this new performance information coming online, we should make tenure decisions at a later period where we have more information about teacher effectiveness.

This may sound self-serving, but I do believe we should encourage the involvement of objective professional research analysts to use these databases and to compare findings with other jurisdictions. To ensure their best use, the data should also—and this is important—be protected from an overly conservative interpretation of FERPA, which has retarded effective research in some States.

So, in summary, when it comes to K–12 education, the research is showing it is largely about teachers, teachers, teachers. The recommendations I offered need much detail before they can be implemented, but I think the important thing right now is a commitment to improve teacher performance and to let decisions be guided by objective information about what works.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Dr. Hannaway.

Mr. Hill, your statement, please.

TESTIMONY OF JOHN W. HILL,[1] CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FEDERAL CITY COUNCIL

Mr. HILL. Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka. I am John Hill, the Chief Executive Officer of the Federal City Council. The Federal City Council is a nonprofit organization comprised of about 250 business and civic leaders in the District of Columbia and focused on creating strong partnerships between the business community and the District for the benefit of District residents. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the performance of the DC Public Schools.

The Federal City Council was created over 50 years as a way for the business community to be a partner in the civic progress of the District of Columbia. Since then, we have embraced a number of complex and challenging projects aimed at revitalizing downtown, providing affordable housing, improving public safety, and strengthening neighborhoods. Over time, it has become clear that the District's future success depends on the health and the well-being of its public education system. For this reason, public education reform has been a top priority of ours for many years.

[1] The prepared statement of Mr. Hill appears in the Appendix on page 100.

Twenty years ago, we attempted to provide a catalyst for change through the formation of the Committee on Public Education. This was done at the request of the DC Board of Education, the superintendent, and in partnership with the DC Council and the mayor. What we saw then mirrors what we see now. COPE brought together civic leaders, business leaders, educational institutions, and national experts to recommend a path forward for education reform. The resulting recommendations spanned many areas ranging from modernizing facilities, reducing administrative overhead, streamlining the central office, upgrading principal and teacher quality, providing teacher training and merit pay, strengthening reading, writing, math, and science programs; expanding the use of technology, and supporting at-risk children as early as age 3.

At the time, COPE helped to establish a broad base of support for school reform, but due to the dire financial conditions of the District that developed in the early 1990s, the school system never followed through. Since then, our members have remained interested in education reform, although some of the momentum had shifted in the late 1990s toward the development of what is now a strong charter school presence in the District of Columbia.

Last year, we once again became very optimistic about public education reform when Mayor Adrian Fenty made education his top priority. We are strong supporters of his effort to gain responsibility for education, and we helped raise funds for this initiative. We are encouraged by the window of opportunity that has opened for the District to produce real and lasting school reform.

Since the mayor gained control over education, he and his leadership team have moved quickly to try to improve the system. Victor Reinoso, Deborah Gist, Allen Lew, and Chancellor Rhee have all brought a sense of urgency and action to the work before them.

Over the past year, we have seen bold moves to hold employees accountable, streamline central administration, and close underutilized schools. Problems of accountability, red tape, and poor management of resources have always plagued the system, but it took the mayor and his leadership team to decide and to execute a course of action. We applaud these efforts and feel that there is a strong momentum to help make the difficult decisions necessary to advance the interests of the school children. Based on the above, we really judge the first phase of this reform effort a success.

It is too early to judge the ultimate success of school reform because there is a long road ahead. We have heard criticism that has been aimed at the mayor and his leadership team for not communicating a grand vision or a comprehensive strategic plan for school reform. Our view is that you cannot develop a reasonable and sustainable plan without completing some of this fundamental work that is currently underway, including accurate accounting for every public dollar that is currently spent by the school system, assessing the platforms that support personnel, procurement, financial management, and technology that is needed to support this long-term reform; evaluating the quality of our workforce and developing ways to encourage excellence, support improvement, and eliminate incompetency; promoting and recruiting the managerial and educational talent that is needed to ensure the capacity for reform; and

fixing school facilities so that our students do not have to really strive to learn in environments of neglect, decay, and filth.

These are not visionary or strategic planning elements. These are basic functional needs of any organization, and these elements become the nuts and bolts of reform. In the past, the District has been known for its tendency to plan and plan. What we need today is to execute on all of the planning work that has been done to date and to focus on building up the essential infrastructure for reform that is necessary for long-term success.

These basic steps we have seen will stir controversy amongst those who are benefiting from the broken system that we have today, but these steps must be taken. The Federal City Council is focused on the long term. We, too, are interested in understanding what the classroom of the future will look like in the District of Columbia. We want to hear more about arts and athletic programs. However, we are under no illusion about the hard work that must be done before we can have a fruitful conversation about that future.

Today, difficult decisions are going to be required to overcome decades of neglect. Additional resources may be needed to overhaul the system's broken infrastructure, and there will be more opposition from the forces of the status quo as we move ahead.

Over the next year, we look forward to the chancellor finally operating with the full complement of motivated and talented staff, which will enable her to keep focus on the classroom without compromising the administrative work that needs to be done.

We look forward to the development of a budget that begins with the needs of students and builds up from there. We will look forward to the improvements in basic education and business systems and the processes that underlie what happens in the school system.

Finally, we look forward to a new focus on principal and teacher accountability that promotes and rewards those who perform well and removes from our classrooms those who are not serving our students well.

On behalf of the Federal City Council, I am here to let you know that our organization supports the reform efforts that are underway, that we expect these first years to be among the most difficult, and that we are prepared—and we know that you are as well—to fortify these reform efforts to be partners in helping improve education for the District's children because they deserve no less. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Hill.

To both of you, as you have heard, GAO's central recommendation is for the development of a long-term systemwide strategic plan. Based on your perspective, what do you think about GAO's recommendation? And what do you think about Deputy Mayor Reinoso's response? Dr. Hannaway.

Ms. HANNAWAY. I think strategic plans, long-term strategic plans, are clearly a good thing. The problem is when they become inflexible. And I think part of the discussion among the individuals on the earlier panel had to do with what is short term and what is long term and how can this organization, this District, organize itself so that it really becomes a learning organization itself. If we knew what the best plan was, if we knew how to put all the pieces

in place right now, we should just do it. I do not think anyone would claim that we know what all the pieces are and how all the pieces will work together.

So what we have to ensure, I think, is that we have a system where there is objective information, feedback, where there is a system in which all the players are working together, and where there is a system that is flexible and adaptable and can learn as new problems arise and as successes unfold.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Mr. Hill.

Mr. HILL. Yes, I would definitely agree with Dr. Hannaway's comments. I would also say that I spent 10 years of my professional career with GAO, and part of that was actually reviewing the District of Columbia finances just before the creation of the Control Board. And I do understand GAO's recommendation, and I certainly agree and understand the importance of strategic planning.

I believe that strategic plans work best when they are developed and also put in cultures of action and cultures of reform. The current culture within the District of Columbia, and certainly within the DC Public School system when this mayor took over, was not a culture of action, and it certainly was not a culture of reform. It was a culture of stagnation, it was a culture of fingerpointing, and not a culture of accountability.

I think when you have that in place initially, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to develop a strategic plan that can be acted upon, because the people who would help to develop that and to ultimately implement that are not in place to really understand the importance of action.

And so I agree that it is a matter of timing. I agree with the actions that are being taken now to change that culture, and that once that culture is changed and on the road to improvement, then would be the appropriate time to really work on a strategic plan that could be acted upon and implemented.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Dr. Hannaway, one of the recommendations in your testimony is for DCPS to take teachers with non-traditional backgrounds, but teachers with non-traditional backgrounds might not have the required certifications. How do you propose DCPS ensure that non-traditional teachers meet OSSE's rigorous quality standards?

Ms. HANNAWAY. Well, as I understand it from part of the testimony this morning, some of what the certification standards are are being re-thought in OSSE. This is something that school districts across the country are struggling with. What we know is that certification, as it is now defined in most places, is not associated with effective teaching. So the question is how we go about selecting teachers.

We have just completed some research on Teach for America that shows very promising results for Teach for America. These are individuals coming in without traditional teacher training programs; however, they do get certified in order to comply with No Child Left Behind. The hoops that you have to go through to do that are not necessarily the hoops that lead them to be more effective. I think this is a wide open area. I think the District should experiment with identifying talented people, follow their performance

carefully, build in support systems in case someone has made a wrong bet.

One thing that is striking in education, Mr. Chairman, is that there is very little hierarchy, so a teacher who is a first-year teacher in a school district is treated the same way that a 30-year veteran is treated. Each goes to their own classroom and closes the door. That does not make a lot of sense.

So you can imagine if the district were to experiment with teachers coming in in different routes that there may be mechanisms—and it is one of the reasons I put in the recommendation that all teachers, regardless of their background, should be receiving ongoing support, ongoing monitoring by more experienced and talented and shown-to-be-effective teachers, and they should be getting and their principals should be getting information back on their effectiveness.

How to switch to a new system is not yet clear, and a number of school districts are experimenting with this. But what we know right now is that the certification requirements for the most part that are required are not qualifications that appear to be associated with teachers being more or less effectiveness.

So I do not have the solution. I have a better handle on the problem, and I think the solution will come from some experimentation.

Senator AKAKA. Well, Dr. Hannaway, what recommendations would you have for the OSSE in developing standards for high-quality teachers?

Ms. HANNAWAY. I would start by differentiating the teaching labor force. Right now, as I said, it is one standard. You are either certified or not certified. And as soon as you get certified, you are pretty much on your own and assumed to be effective. And we know that is not the case.

So one can imagine having a differentiated teaching workforce whereby for the first year, maybe for the first 2 years, you do not have a classroom by yourself, that you are under closer supervision, that you get certification partly on the job on the basis of your performance as opposed to on checklists of qualifications that are achieved prior to your being in the classroom.

So I would put down the line some of these decisions rather than trying to lock them in on the basis of what we know is imperfect information at the start.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Mr. Hill, in your testimony you recommend that a partnership between the community and the District Government must exist in order for the school system reform to be successful. How do you envision this partnership taking shape? And who do you see as the key players on the community side of the partnership?

Mr. HILL. I do think that the partnership is taking place. I believe some of the key players are certainly the people who are really benefiting and using the education system. Our view—and it was certainly borne out through the work that was done through the COPE report—is that the issue of education is really one that needs to involve parents, that needs to involve students, that also needs to involve community leaders at all levels, as well as the business community.

Our role in the partnership is to help to provide business expertise to solve business-level problems within the school system. We do not pretend to be educators because, for the most part, we are not, and we realize that is a specialized area. However, supporting the school system and supporting the educational process is an important part of the reform that needs to take place. And so our members who really sit on top of multinational companies, as well as large companies within the District of Columbia, volunteer time and effort in helping to pull together strategies as well as resources so that the school system can meet the needs of the students.

During my time at "In2Books"—I was CEO of a nonprofit that was working with the District on improving literacy and teacher training around literacy, and one of the things that we found in terms of teacher training was that some of the teachers that really came out of educational programs in major universities were not really aware of some of the latest research that had been done on how children learn to read and the brain research about how students are stimulated in terms of reading. We believe that the ability to read was one of the fundamental predictors of a child's success in later years in school.

And so in addition to bringing people in with alternative backgrounds into the teaching pool, I think there also needs to be a look at what is happening in education programs that are getting teachers ready around the country to make sure they reflect some of the latest thinking and latest research around how students learn to read.

Senator AKAKA. Dr. Hannaway, under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools are not given—and this is what is so important, and I know you know this is important. Schools are not given much flexibility in the measurements required to assess school accountability and teacher effectiveness. In dealing with underserved populations who may need non-traditional styles of teaching, do you see these requirements as an impediment to measuring teacher effectiveness?

Ms. HANNAWAY. I think you are asking two questions. Just let me make sure I understand. One was about the way schools are evaluated with No Child Left Behind, and the other how they qualify the teachers. I think there has been some flexibility now at the department. Not making adequate yearly progress was based on proficiency levels. It was not based on gains. In one study I did, I compared the Florida accountability system, which was based on gains that schools were making, that individual students were making, and the No Child Left Behind assigning of not making adequate progress. And I cannot remember the exact numbers, but it was two diametrically different systems, where a very large fraction of the schools in Florida that were—and I can get you the paper on this, Senator, if you are interested—graded as A by the State system, which was rewarding schools for making a difference, for making gains, were not making adequate yearly progress according to the Federal designation.

So a real issue with No Child Left Behind is how schools are designated as making adequate progress or not making adequate yearly progress, and it makes a big difference how that is done. When

you actually look at gains of individual students, you can see a very different picture than when you just look at proficiency levels.

Let me give you an example. You can imagine a school in the District of Columbia where students on average had increased their reading levels by, say, a grade and a half, which is very large to get that grade and a half. But, still, only 60 percent or 40 percent of the students were hitting the proficiency target that had been specified. These are artificial targets because it is assumed that all children will meet full proficiency by 2012. So they are artificial targets.

So rather than rewarding the school where we are seeing real gains in student reading, we are saying you are not making adequate progress because you haven't hit this proficiency mark, which I would argue is somewhat arbitrarily defined.

But I think that is becoming clearer and clearer to policymakers, and I think there are some shifts going on now in the Department of Education allowing States to use gain models as opposed to levels.

When you look at highly qualified teachers, the highly qualified teacher provisions are basically the State provisions for certification, and those we know are not the factors that seem to distinguish highly effective and ineffective teachers. That does not mean that we have to throw everything out, but I think we have to get a lot closer picture of what it is that makes a difference. I think we may have to be a lot tougher in terms of who gets certified. I would do it partly on the basis of actual performance that we are able to see. And I think we probably have to be a lot tougher in terms of who actually gets tenure. And that may result in some changes in the whole pay schedule associated with teachers and teaching.

Senator AKAKA. Well, I really appreciate your deep understanding out of your research of these matters and also, Mr. Hill, on your relationships of supportive partnerships to the education program, and this will be helpful to the Subcommittee.

I want to thank you for coming and being with us today and for your dedication and your commitment to reforming DC's public schools and its education system. There has been significant progress made and, indeed, some great results. So I am pleased to hear about the strategic plans being developed and used by DCPS, OSSE, and the Facilities Office in this transformational year. I think the entire system will do well to have a long-term strategic plan for the reforms; however, they need a base to put that on, and I think they are quickly shaping that base. I hope the reforms bring more than management changes. They need to improve the way the children of the Nation's capital are educated. And so I thank you again for your contribution in this respect.

The hearing record will remain open for one week for any additional statements or questions that Members may have. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

United States Government Accountability Office

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. EST
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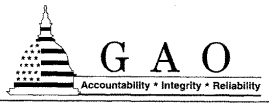
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While Early Reform Efforts Tackle Critical Management Issues, a District-Wide Strategic Education Plan Would Help Guide Long-Term Efforts

Statement of Cornelia M. Ashby, Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security



GAO-08-549T

March 14, 2008

GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-08-549T, testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While Early Reform Efforts Tackle Critical Management Issues, a District-Wide Strategic Education Plan Would Help Guide Long-Term Efforts

Why GAO Did This Study

In response to long-standing problems with student academic performance, the condition of school facilities, and the overall management of the D.C. public school system, the D.C. Council approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (Reform Act). The Reform Act made major changes to the operations and governance of the D.C. public school system, giving the Mayor authority over public schools, including curricula, personnel, and school facilities. While other large urban districts have transferred governance of schools to their mayors, D.C. is unique because it functions as both local and state offices for many education responsibilities.

GAO's testimony focuses on (1) the status of the District's efforts to reform its public school system, and (2) what the District has done to establish accountability for these efforts. To address these issues GAO reviewed documents, interviewed District education officials and interviewed principals from nine D.C. public schools.

What GAO Recommends

To sustain D.C.'s efforts to transform its public school system, GAO recommends that the D.C. Department of Education develop a long-term districtwide education strategic plan. In response, the District supported the need for a strategy, but preferred a formal process rather than a written document to coordinate and sustain its efforts.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-549T. For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The early efforts to improve D.C. public schools have focused largely on broad management reforms and other activities that lay the foundation for long-term improvements to the D.C. public school system. The broad management reforms included the transfer of many functions from D.C. public schools (DCPS) into the new office of the state superintendent, which could allow for more effective oversight of the District's education programs. Prior to the Reform Act, there was no clear separation of funding, reporting, and staffing between local and state functions. A new facilities office was also created to improve the conditions of DCPS school facilities. Moving state-level education and facilities functions out of DCPS is intended to give the head of DCPS, called the Chancellor, more time to focus on issues that directly affect student achievement. The management reforms also included specific human capital initiatives such as new DCPS central office personnel rules and new systems for evaluating central office and state-level employee performance. In addition, both the State Superintendent and the Chancellor are working to improve their data systems to better track and monitor the performance of students, teachers, and schools. DCPS also completed its school consolidation plan that identified over 20 schools for closure over the next several years. In addition, the school facilities office is working to address the backlog of repairs. The director of the facilities office told us that he found that school heating and plumbing systems were inoperable, roofs leaked, and floors needed replacing. In addition, he said many schools were in violation of District fire codes. To address the backlog and ongoing facilities needs, the new office undertook several repair programs this summer and early fall.

The D.C. Mayor and education officials have introduced a performance-based process designed to establish accountability for their school reform efforts. This process includes weekly meetings to track progress and accomplishments across education offices. In addition, the Mayor's office required agencies to develop annual performance plans. D.C. Department of Education officials told us they review the individual performance plans of District education offices, such as DCPS and the state superintendent's office, to ensure they are aligned. Officials told us they have not yet developed a documented districtwide education strategic plan. According to department officials, they do not intend to develop a written plan at this time, in part, because they are addressing immediate issues. They questioned the need for a written document as opposed to a formalized process that would help ensure that individual plans are coordinated. While developing a strategic plan takes time, it is useful for entities undergoing a major transformation, such as the D.C. public school system. A strategic plan helps organizations look across the goals of multiple offices and identify if they are aligned or working at cross-purposes. Without a plan that sets priorities, implementation goals, and timelines, it may be difficult to measure progress over time and determine if the District is truly achieving success. In addition, given that leadership changes, a strategic plan would provide a road map for future District leaders by explaining the steps taken, or not taken, and why.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to present information on the District of Columbia's (D.C. or District) progress in reforming its public school system. The system serves about 50,000 students and operates 144 schools.[1] In fiscal year 2007, its operating budget exceeded $1 billion and the federal government provided funds for about 13 percent of that amount. Long-standing problems with student academic performance, the condition of school facilities, and the overall management of the D.C. school system have been well documented over the last several decades. In particular, the academic challenges facing the District are enormous. In 2007, D.C. public schools ranked last in math scores and second-to-last in reading scores for all tested urban public school systems on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Also called "The Nation's Report Card," the NAEP has been conducted regularly since 1969 and tracks student achievement throughout the United States over time.

In response to these critical problems, the Council of the District of Columbia (D.C. Council) approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007[2] (Reform Act), which made major changes to the operations and governance of the D.C. school system. The act gave the Mayor authority over public schools, including curricula, operations, budget, personnel, and school facilities. While other large urban school districts have transferred governance of their troubled public schools to their mayors, D.C. is unique because it functions as both a local and state agency for many education responsibilities.

In addition to granting the Mayor authority over the schools, the Reform Act also made the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) a cabinet-level agency under the Mayor's office and moved functions from building repairs to administration of federal education programs out of DCPS and into two separate, new offices. (In this statement, we frequently refer to DCPS and these two new offices as education offices.) Given the magnitude of the

[1]This number does not include about 81 charter schools. Charter schools are public schools that are exempt from certain regulations in exchange for increased accountability for improving student achievement. This testimony statement does not include a discussion of charter schools.

[2]The Council of the District of Columbia approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 on April 19. District of Columbia Laws, Act 17-38 (2007). The bill was then passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush on June 1. Pub. L. No. 110-33.

school system's challenges and the changes made by the Reform Act, you asked us to assess the progress to date of the reform efforts. My testimony today will focus on (1) the status of the District's efforts to reform its public school system and (2) what the District has done to establish accountability for these efforts.

In summary, the early initiatives to improve the D.C. public school system have focused largely on broad management reforms and other activities that lay the foundation for long-term improvements. The broad management reforms included the transfer of many functions from DCPS to the new offices of the state superintendent and facilities. One purpose of the transfer was to give the head of DCPS, called the Chancellor, more time to focus on issues that directly affect student achievement. The management reforms also included specific human capital initiatives such as new DCPS central office personnel rules and new systems for evaluating central office employee performance to establish more efficient, functional offices. District education offices have also begun to lay a foundation for long-term improvements to schools by enhancing student and personnel data systems, developing a plan for school consolidation, setting academic priorities, and improving management of school facilities. The Mayor and education officials have also introduced a performance-based process designed to establish accountability for their school reform efforts. This process includes holding weekly meetings to track progress and accomplishments across education offices and requiring these offices to develop and follow annual performance plans. However, the Mayor's team has not yet developed a districtwide strategic education plan. Without such a plan, it may be difficult to coordinate the work of multiple offices and evaluate short-term and long-term progress. In order to assess the District's progress in improving its public school system and provide a road map for future District leadership and concerned community groups, we recommend the development of a districtwide education strategic plan.

To assess the progress of the Mayor's reform efforts and actions taken to establish accountability for these efforts, we interviewed the Deputy Mayor for Education, who heads the D.C. Department of Education, the Chancellor of DCPS, the State Superintendent of Education, and the Director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (the facilities office). We also interviewed key staff in these offices. We analyzed planning documents that established the goals, time frames, and performance measures for individual offices, and relevant laws related to D.C. reform efforts. We interviewed officials with the D.C. Office of the Inspector General and officials at the U.S. Department of Education who

monitor how the District administers its federal education grants. We also interviewed principals from nine D.C. public schools to discuss matters such as the status of repairs to their buildings.[3] We analyzed recent evaluations of DCPS and interviewed staff who conducted these evaluations.[4] We conducted our work from September 2007 to March 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Background

The problems in the D.C. public school system have persisted for years despite numerous efforts at reform. In 1989, a report by the D.C. Committee on Public Education noted declining achievement levels as students move through grades, the poor condition of the school system's physical facilities, and the lack of accountability among D.C. agencies for the schools.[5] Recent reports have continued to cite these problems. In 2004, the Council of the Great City Schools reviewed the D.C. school system and cited the continued failure to improve students' academic performance.[6] In 2006, an analysis of DCPS reform efforts by a consulting firm found no progress and recommended a change in governance to improve student achievement and systemwide accountability.[7]

In response to these problems, the D.C. Council (the legislative branch of the D.C. government) approved the 2007 Reform Act, which significantly altered the governance of the D.C. public schools.[8] The Reform Act transferred the day-to-day management of the public schools from the

[3]We chose these schools to obtain variation in the type of school (elementary, middle, or high school); location (ward); whether repair work had been during the summer of 2007; and whether there was an interim principal.

[4]These evaluations included several studies by the Council of the Great City Schools, a national organization representing the needs of urban public schools, and D.C. Voice, a citywide community organization that reports on conditions in the D.C. public schools.

[5]*Our Children, Our Future: Revitalizing The District of Columbia Public Schools*, The D.C. Committee on Public Education, Washington, D.C. (June 1989).

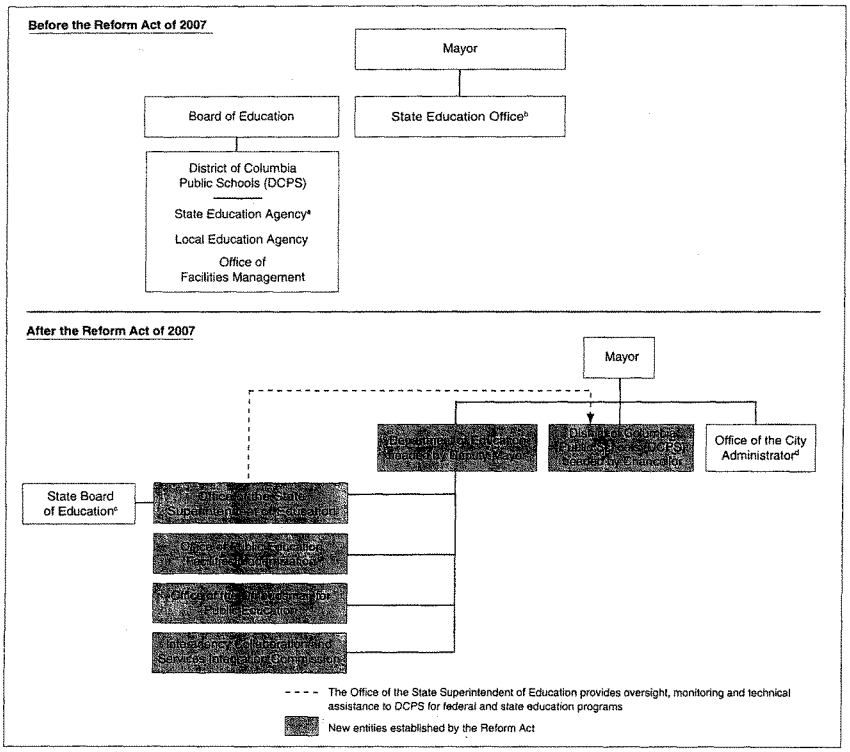
[6]*Restoring Excellence to the District of Columbia Public Schools*, Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, D.C (January 2004).

[7]*Fact-Base for DCPS Reform*, The Parthenon Group, Boston, London, San Francisco (December 2006).

[8]Subsequent to the Council's approval, Congress passed the Reform Act. The District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act, also known as the Home Rule Act, generally provides a framework and processes for Congress to enact, amend, or repeal any act with respect to the District of Columbia.

Board of Education to the Mayor and placed DCPS under the Mayor's office as a cabinet-level agency. Prior to the Reform Act, the head of DCPS reported to the Board of Education. The Reform Act also moved the state functions into a new state superintendent's office, moved the facilities office out of DCPS, and created a D.C. Department of Education headed by the Deputy Mayor for Education. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: D.C. Public Schools Governance Structure, prior to the 2007 Reform Act and after the Reform Act



Source: GAO analysis based on The Parthenon Group, December 2006 and D.C. government documents.

[a]The State Education Agency had responsibility for administering federal grant money, and setting state academic standards, achievement goals, and graduation requirements. The Local Education Agency, typically referred to as the school district, had responsibility for the management and operations of D.C. public schools.

[8]The State Education Office administered food nutrition programs and state scholarship grants.

[7]The State Board of Education was the Board of Education prior to the Reform Act.

[6]The Office of the City Administrator prepares the District's annual operating budget and provides direction to all District agencies, including DCPS. Prior to the Reform Act, the City Administrator did not have this role because the Mayor did not have direct oversight of DCPS.

DCPS: DCPS functions as a traditional local educational agency, or school district. The head of DCPS, the Chancellor, is appointed by the Mayor, confirmed by the D.C. Council, and serves at the Mayor's discretion. The Chancellor sets the academic priorities and the curriculum for public schools, and works with schools in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA).[9] School districts have the primary responsibility for ensuring that underperforming schools receive technical assistance, as required by NCLBA.

Department of Education: The new D.C. Department of Education is headed by the Deputy Major for Education and oversees the state superintendent's office, facilities office, and the ombudsman's office.[10] The department is responsible for planning, coordinating, and supervising all public education and education-related activities that are under the purview of these three offices. It also acts as chief advisor to the Mayor for broad, high-level education strategies that involve more than one District education office and has responsibility for bringing together key players to determine who should take the lead on specific initiatives. In addition, the Deputy Mayor coordinates the work, direction, and agenda of the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (Interagency Commission), which serves as a high-level policy making body that coordinates meetings with directors from children and youth-serving agencies. According to the Deputy Mayor, the purpose of the Interagency Commission is to build consensus and set priorities for how to best address the needs of District children and youth.

[9]Under NCLBA, states are required to establish performance goals and hold schools that receive federal funds under Title I of the act accountable for student performance by determining whether or not they have made adequate yearly progress. Schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for 2 or more consecutive years are identified as in need of improvement and must implement certain activities meant to improve student academic achievement.

[10]The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education is tasked with providing outreach to residents, including parents, and encouraging communication between residents and the Mayor. In short, it serves as a vehicle for citizens to communicate their complaints and concerns regarding public education and for providing responses to these concerns in a timely fashion.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education: The state superintendent's office is responsible for functions traditionally handled by a state educational agency. It develops academic standards, helps develop teacher licensing requirements, and administers funds for federal and District education programs. The State Superintendent is also responsible for developing comprehensive assessments, or tests, and ensuring that DCPS meets federal requirements for elementary and secondary education under NCLBA.[11] The office also oversees, among other functions, those related to early childhood education programs and adult education and literacy.

State Board of Education: While the Board of Education—renamed the State Board of Education—no longer has responsibility for day-to-day operations of the public schools, it is responsible for approving the District's academic standards, high-school graduation requirements, and other educational standards. It is required to advise the State Superintendent on policies related to the governing of vocational and charter schools and proposed education regulations. Five of the nine State Board of Education members are elected and four are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the D.C. Council.

Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (facilities office): The Reform Act not only moved the facilities office out of DCPS but gave the new office independent procurement and personnel authority. These functions were formerly performed by separate divisions within DCPS not directly accountable to or managed by the DCPS facilities office. The new facilities office is responsible for modernization and maintenance of D.C. public schools.[12] DCPS retains oversight of the janitorial services of individual schools.

[11]The state also plays a role in providing technical assistance to schools in improvement and overseeing the improvement activities of districts. State educational agencies are responsible for making several forms of technical assistance available to schools in improvement and overseeing the improvement activities of districts. For more information on the role of state educational agencies under NCLBA, see *No Child Left Behind Act: Education Should Clarify Guidance and Address Potential Compliance Issues for Schools in Corrective Action and Restructuring Status*, GAO-07-1035. (Washington, D.C.: September 2007)

[12]The School Modernization Use of Funds Requirements Emergency Amendment Act of 2007 gave the facilities office the authority to conduct maintenance activities at D.C schools. District of Columbia Laws, Act 17-216 (2007).

The Reform Act also gave the D.C. Council an expanded role in overseeing some aspects of D.C. public school management. For example, the Mayor is required to submit proposed DCPS rules and regulations to the Council for review. In addition, the Council has gained new powers over the DCPS budget. The Mayor submits the budget for Council review and the Council may modify the funding allocated to individual schools. Previously, the Council only had authority to approve or disapprove the budget.

Early Initiatives Are Focused on Broad Management Reforms and Establishing a Foundation for Long-Term Improvements

The early efforts to improve D.C. public schools have focused largely on broad management reforms and other activities that lay the foundation for long-term improvements, such as developing new data systems, a school consolidation plan, academic priorities, and improving school facilities. Management reforms included the transfer of many functions from DCPS to the new offices of state superintendent and facilities. According to District officials, moving state-level education and facility functions out of DCPS should give the Chancellor more time to focus on issues that directly affect student achievement. Furthermore, moving state functions out of DCPS is intended to allow more effective oversight of the District's education programs. The management reforms also included specific human capital initiatives, such as new central office personnel rules and new systems for evaluating central office and state employee performance that are designed to improve office efficiency. District education offices also have begun to lay a foundation for long-term improvements to student and personnel data systems and management of building maintenance.

Broad Management Reforms Include Office Restructuring and Human Capital Initiatives

As required by the Reform Act, state-level education functions previously performed by DCPS were transferred to the new office of the state superintendent.[13] This office developed a transition plan, as required by the Reform Act, which detailed the transfer of authority and restructuring of key staff functions and budgets. On October 1, 2007, over 100 staff, functions, and associated funds were transferred to the office of the state superintendent. Staff who spent at least half their time working on state-level functions, such as administering funds for federal and state education programs, became employees of the state superintendent's office. The Reform Act moved state functions out of DCPS, in large part, to

[13]The Reform Act consolidated state-level education functions that were previously performed by DCPS and the State Education Agency, and several other offices into one office, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

provide for independent oversight. Prior to the Reform Act, there was no clear separation of funding, reporting, and staffing between local and state functions within DCPS. For example, staff who monitored federal grant programs reported to the same person as staff who implemented those programs. As a result of the Reform Act, staff who perform state-related functions, such as monitoring federal programs, report to the State Superintendent whereas staff who implement the programs report to the DCPS Chancellor.

The transition plan also laid out immediate and long-term priorities, such as federal grants management reform and improved teacher quality. To improve federal grants management, the State Superintendent has established priorities and begun to address long-term deficiencies identified by the U.S. Department of Education (Education) related to federal program administration, including compliance with NCLBA.[14] Specifically, the State Superintendent has established a direct line of accountability by having the director of federal grants report directly to her and serve on her leadership team. In addition, to meet NCLBA requirements, the State Superintendent is in the process of establishing a statewide system of support that will provide technical assistance to underperforming schools. The State Superintendent has stated that establishing this process is challenging, given that 75 percent of D. C. schools have been identified as needing improvement under NCLBA. The district also ranks as one of the lowest school districts for having qualified teachers, with only 55 percent of core classes taught by teachers that meet NCLBA requirements for highly qualified.[15] The transition plan identified teacher quality as a priority area, but does not outline measurable goals for increasing the number of highly qualified teachers. According to the State Superintendent, the office has started to develop a strategic plan that will provide more specifics on its goals and objectives. Specifically, this plan would include measurable goals such as increasing the number of highly

[14]The U.S. Department of Education designated the District as a high-risk grantee in April 2006 because of its poor management of federal grants. If the District continues to be designated as a high-risk grantee, Education could respond by taking several actions, such as discontinuing one or more federal grants made to the District or having a third party take control over the administration of federal grants.

[15]NCLBA generally requires all teachers of core academic subjects, such as reading, math, and science, to have a bachelor's degree, state certification, and demonstrable subject matter competency for each core subject taught. According to an official at the state superintendent office, the District plans to revise its definition for highly qualified teachers to align with the NCLBA definition. Currently according to agency officials, the District's definition for is more stringent.

qualified teachers. According to the state superintendent's office, this strategic planning effort will be completed in mid-summer 2008.The state superintendent's office also plans to revise the District's "highly qualified teacher" definition under NCLBA and is also considering revisions to how the District certifies teachers to align to the revised definition.

The Reform Act also created a new facilities office to improve the conditions of DCPS school facilities. Unlike state-level functions, DCPS facilities staff and functions have not yet formally transferred to the new facilities office. Although the new office took over responsibility for modernization of school facilities (i.e., major renovations or new construction) and facility maintenance in the summer of 2007, functions and staff will not be formally transferred until the facility budget is "reprogrammed" and moved.[16] In addition, the office will oversee general contractors who are hired for major construction projects such as the building of new schools. The director of the facilities office told us about 400 staff (building engineers, painters, and general maintenance workers) will transfer to his office.

The District's broad management reforms also included an emphasis on human capital initiatives, particularly efforts to hold employees accountable for their work. Both the State Superintendent and the DCPS Chancellor include new individual performance evaluations as part of their efforts to develop high-performing organizations. Previously, performance evaluations were not conducted for most DCPS staff, including those who moved to the state superintendent's office. DCPS officials told us that all staff had received performance evaluations as of January 2008. These evaluation forms were based on District government-wide competencies, such as maintaining and demonstrating high-quality and timely customer service and using resources effectively. DCPS officials told us that these evaluations do not yet link to their offices' performance goals because they had limited time to implement the new performance system. However, they stated that they plan to develop the linkages over the next year. Officials at the state superintendent's office told us that performance measurement plans have been developed for all staff and performance evaluations based on those plans will begin in late March 2008. The State

[16]In the summer of 2007, the Director of the new facilities office and the DCPS Chancellor signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that allowed the director to manage all construction projects for D.C. school facilities. Modernization funds will be moved to the new office when the budget reprogramming occurs. The D.C. Council must approve the reprogramming.

Superintendent has required each staff member to develop an individual plan that includes specific goals that are linked to the office's overall goals as outlined in the office performance plan.

The facilities office intends to create and sustain a culture of high performance and accountability by implementing a performance management system that will hold employees accountable for their work and establish a performance feedback process that ensures "a dialogue between supervisors, managers, and employees throughout the year."[17] Linking individual performance evaluations to organizational goals is an important step in building a high-performing organization. As we noted in a previous report, organizations use their performance management systems to support their strategic goals by helping individuals see the connection between their daily activities and organizational goals.[18]

Other human capital initiatives included the Chancellor's effort to improve the capacity of the central office by terminating central office employees who were assessed as not meeting expectations on their performance evaluations and replacing them with staff who have the requisite skills. Specifically, the Chancellor told us she needs staff who are capable of providing critical central office services, so that, for example, teachers are paid and textbooks delivered on time. Several principals we spoke with told us that school staff have spent considerable time on repeatedly calling the central office for support or supplies, time that could otherwise be spent on instruction. In January 2008, the D.C. Council passed the Public Education Personnel Reform Amendment Act of 2008,[19] submitted by the Chancellor and the Mayor, which gave the Mayor greater authority to terminate certain staff within DCPS' central office, including non-union staff and staff hired after 1980. [20] According to the Chancellor, this

[17]See *Transition Plan: Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization* (Washington D.C. Dec. 3, 2007).

[18]GAO *Results-Oriented Cultures: Creating a Clear Linkage between Individual Performance and Organizational Success*, GAO-03-488 (Washington, D.C.: March 2003).

[19]District of Columbia Laws, Act 17-271 (2008).

[20]Under prior law, employees may only be terminated for cause and have greater procedural protections when decisions to terminate are made. In the first year after enactment, the new law would authorize the termination of certain employees without notice or performance evaluations. Future terminations would require a 15-day separation notice and performance evaluations within 6 months of separation. The new personnel law also applies to certain staff within the state superintendent's office and facilities office.

legislation ultimately will allow her to begin building a workforce that has the qualifications needed for a high-functioning central office.[21]

Other Activities, Such as Developing New Data Systems, a School Consolidation Plan, and Academic Priorities, Have Begun to Lay the Foundation for Long-Term Improvements

Both the state superintendent's office and DCPS are working to improve their data systems to better track and monitor the performance of students, teachers, and schools. The superintendent's office is in the process of selecting a contractor to build a longitudinal database that will store current and historical data on students, teachers, and schools. Currently, there is no one system that tracks the movement of students among District schools. The new database is being designed to standardize how data are collected from DCPS and charter schools and to track student data, such as attendance and test scores across multiple years. According to the state superintendent's office, this database will help stakeholders identify which schools and teachers are improving student achievement and determine what instructional approaches work best for which types of students. Education awarded the state superintendent's office a 3-year grant totaling nearly $6 million to help fund this effort. The database is expected to be fully operational by 2012.

DCPS is also focused on improving the quality of student data, some of which will be inputted into the state longitudinal database. Currently, DCPS student data are not consistently reported throughout the numerous data systems. In addition, the multiple systems often have contradictory information. For example, the Chancellor told us that one system showed there were 5,000 special education students in the District while another showed 10,000. To address these problems, DCPS told us that they are consolidating its data systems, eliminating duplicate information, and verifying data accuracy. DCPS officials told us they expect the new student data management system to be operational by February 2009.

In addition to student data systems, DCPS has also taken steps to change and improve its personnel data systems by moving from a paper-based to an electronic system. DCPS scanned millions of personnel files into an electronic data system. According to agency officials, this was necessary because the files that existed were in unorganized stacks in office closets and not securely maintained. DCPS officials told us that they had scanned nearly 5 million documents. The scanning revealed missing personnel records for some staff members and, in other cases, job descriptions that

[21]On March 7, 2008, 98 staff members in the DCPS central office were terminated pursuant to the authority granted by the new law.

did not match the jobs staff were actually performing. In addition, the D.C. Office of the Inspector General is currently conducting an audit of the DCPS payroll system, to be released in the summer of 2008, to verify that every individual who receives a paycheck from DCPS is currently employed with the school system.

In February 2008, DCPS completed its preliminary school consolidation (closing) plan that identified over 20 schools for closure over the next several years in an effort to provide more resources to the remaining schools. Plans to consolidate D.C. public schools have been underway in recent years and Congress has raised concerns about the inefficiency of maintaining millions of square feet of underutilized or unused space in DCPS facilities. (DCPS is currently operating at approximately 330 square feet per student, while the national average is 150 square feet.) According to DCPS officials, the cost of administration, staff, and facilities in underutilized schools diverts resources from academic programs for all students. However, it is unclear how much long-term savings, if any, will result from these closings. DCPS officials told us that they are currently working with the facilities office and the District Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) to develop long-term cost estimates. In addition, some parents, community groups, and the D.C. Council disagreed with the process the Chancellor and Mayor used to develop the plan. The D.C. Council expressed concern that the Mayor and Chancellor did not present the proposal to the Council before it was made public,[22] and some community members met to express their opposition to the closings. The Chancellor provided a detailed report of the criteria[23] used to select schools for closure and held community meetings. Based on input from parents and the community, the Chancellor revised the list of schools to be closed. The consolidation plan was finalized in March 2008.

In the area of academic achievement, DCPS has set academic priorities for the 2007-2008 school year and is in the process of establishing longer-term priorities. The Chancellor told us that the academic priorities will build on DCPS' 2006 Master Education Plan, which established key strategies and goals to direct instruction within DCPS. The Chancellor noted, however, that the 2006 plan cited copious goals and objectives without prioritizing

[22]The Chancellor's school consolidation plan was reported in the Washington Post on November 28, 2007, before the Chancellor provided the plan to the D.C. Council.

[23]The primary criterion for school closings was the decline in student enrollment in schools from 2002-2006.

and establishing explicit time frames or clear strategies for how DCPS would meet the goals. In November 2007, DCPS laid out its 2007-2008 academic priorities, which included key objectives and strategies that focus on improving student achievement, school facilities, parental and community involvement, and central office operations. For example, under its objective to improve student achievement, DCPS identified, as a major initiative, efforts to recruit and hire high-quality principals for roughly one-third of its schools. According to the Chancellor, getting high-quality principals to serve as instructional leaders is a key step to improving the quality of teachers and classroom instruction. DCPS has launched a national recruitment strategy and plans to select candidates by the end of the 2007-2008 school year. The Chancellor is also focusing on longer-term priorities, such as developing a districtwide curriculum aligned to academic standards and assessments, and providing teachers with professional development on instructional strategies for the curriculum. DCPS is currently working on a five year academic plan that is to be completed by March 2008. (See table 1 for key initiative and completion dates.)

Table 1: Status of DCPS and State Superintendent Office Key Initiatives and Scheduled Completion Date or Completed Date

Office	Key initiatives	Scheduled completion Date	Completed
DCPS	• Fill teacher vacancies and deliver textbooks by opening day of 2007-08 school year	August 2007	✓
	• Set academic priorities for 2007-08 school year	November 2007	✓
	• Announce school consolidation plan	November 2007	✓
	• Implement new employee evaluation system for central office personnel	December 2007	✓
	• Launch Campaign to Recruit Candidates for Principal Positions	December 2007	✓
	• Hold community hearings on preliminary school consolidation plan	January-February 2008	✓
	• Finalize school consolidation plan	March 2008	✓
	• Establish longer term priorities for 2008-09 school year through 2011-12 school year	April 2008	
	• Select candidates for principal positions	May 2008	
	• Consolidate many of the 25 data systems	February 2009	
State Superintendents Office	• Finalize transition plan	September 2007	✓
	• Transfer most state related functions from DCPS	October 2007	✓
	• Refine unique student identification numbers	October 2007	✓
	• Implement a new employee evaluation system	January 2008	✓
	• Award contract to build the statewide longitudinal database	May 2008	
	• Complete development of statewide longitudinal data system	January 2012	

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by D.C. officials

Facilities Has Begun to Address Back Log of Work Orders and Is Developing a New Process to Respond to Needed Repairs

The facilities office has worked since the summer of 2007 to address the backlog of repairs the office inherited from DCPS. The director of the office told us that he found that school heating and plumbing systems were inoperable, roofs leaked, and floors needed replacing. In addition, he told us that many schools were in violation of District fire codes with exit doors locked from the inside for security. The director of the facilities office also told us that when his office took responsibility for school maintenance, he found thousands of work orders that had been submitted to address these building deficiencies that had not been closed. In some cases the repairs were completed but the work order was not closed; however, in many cases, the work orders were several years old and the repairs had not been completed. In addition, the facilities director found that most of the work orders did not adequately reflect the scope of the

work needed, and the cost of the repairs was underestimated. For example, he told us that a work order may request repairs related to the symptom rather than the cause of the problem, such as painting over a water stain in the ceiling rather than fixing the more expensive plumbing problem.

To address the backlog and ongoing facilities needs, the new office undertook several programs this summer and early fall. Repairs were made to over 70 schools that were not slated to undergo modernization for years. According to facilities officials, needed painting, plumbing, electrical, and other work were done at each of the schools. In addition, systems were assessed at all District schools for heat and air conditioning repairs. According to the facilities director, all schools with central air conditioning received upgrades and about 670 new air conditioning units were installed. The office found, however, that about 1,000 to 1,500 classrooms did not have air conditioning. To ensure classrooms have air conditioning by spring 2008, the facilities office is planning to upgrade electrical systems to allow installation of new cooling units. According to the director, the office has also made repairs to school heating systems and all schools had heat by October 15, 2007. He noted that many of the heating repairs could have been avoided if the heating systems had received adequate maintenance. The office found many schools where boilers installed only three to four years ago were inoperable due to poor maintenance. The office also started a "stabilization" program in the fall of 2007, to make improvements to the remaining 70 or so schools. About $120 million is budgeted to correct possible fire code violations and make plumbing, roofing, and other repairs. According to the facilities director, the work order backlog should be largely eliminated by these maintenance and modernization efforts.

Furthermore, a facility official told us that they are prioritizing work order requests by the urgency of the request, that is, whether it is a hazard to students or a routine repair. According to this official, emergency repairs are addressed the day, or the day after, the work order is submitted. Routine repairs and maintenance, such as plumbing and painting, are addressed by the in-house trades (painters, plumbers) while more complicated repairs are addressed by contractors that have been "pre-qualified" by the facility office. Contracts for major repairs, such as replacing an entire roof, are put out for competitive bid.

Finally, District officials told us that the facilities office is in the process of revising the DCPS 2006 Master Facilities Plan, which outlined how DCPS planned to use and improve school buildings, offices and other facilities

over a 15 year period. According to District officials, the revised plan will align with the Chancellor's academic priorities and school consolidation efforts. The Master Facilities Plan was due on October 1, 2007, but the facilities director was granted an extension until May 31, 2008.

D.C. Mayor Has Begun to Develop a Framework for Accountability

The Mayor and education officials have introduced a performance-based process designed to establish accountability for their school reform efforts. This process includes weekly meetings to track progress and accomplishments across education offices and annual performance plans for these offices, including the D.C. Department of Education's plan. According to recent studies of the D.C. school system, little was done in the past to hold offices and education leaders accountable for progress. [24]

Weekly meetings are a key component of the District's performance-based process and, according to the Deputy Mayor for Education, integral to how the Mayor and D.C. education offices monitor the progress of reform efforts. The Mayor's meetings, known as CapStat meetings,[25] are used to track progress and accomplishments across all D.C. government offices. Every 3 months, the City Administrator's office develops a list of topics for possible discussion at CapStat meetings based, in part, on a review of each office's performance plan. According to city officials, issues for CapStat meetings typically concern agencies having difficulty meeting their specific performance targets. These issues are given to the Mayor who then selects which ones will be discussed. The Mayor may also identify other issues that have emerged as immediate concerns, for example, those related to the safety and health of D.C. residents.[26]

[24] *Restoring Excellence to the District of Columbia Public Schools*, Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, D.C. (Jan. 2004); *Fact-Base for DCPS Reform*, The Parthenon Group, Boston, London, San Francisco, (Dec. 2006).

[25] CapStat is modeled after Baltimore's CitiStat accountability program. Baltimore uses CitiStat to develop and employ citywide strategies, measure results, and hold city managers accountable. CitiStat, which began in 2000, is similar to the New York City Police Department's CompStat crime tracking program, which debuted in 1994. While there has been some analysis on the effectiveness of CompStat and CitiStat, it is difficult to determine whether they were the cause of any improvement in government performance.

[26] Over the past 8 months, CapStat meetings have focused on a multitude of issues, including education, economic development, public safety, health and human services, and government operations.

At the CapStat meeting, cognizant managers provide status updates using performance data. The Mayor then assigns follow-up tasks to particular managers with agreed-upon timeframes. The Mayor reviews whether follow-up tasks have been completed. This tracking provides the basis for the Mayor's office to monitor progress, and, if inadequate, determine what further action is needed. For example, during the summer of 2007, a CapStat meeting focused on school facilities. The data indicated that many of the schools' heating systems were not functioning. The Mayor's office asked the director of the facilities office to develop a plan within 2 weeks to ensure that all schools had functional heating systems by mid-October. Officials told us the Mayor's office tracked the submission of the plan and the heating system work. As previously mentioned, District officials reported that all schools had heat by October 15.

The Chancellor and the State Superintendent adopted processes similar to CapStat—SchoolStat and EdStat, respectively—to hold managers accountable for their offices' performance (see table 2 for information on the three "Stat" meetings). The Chancellor uses weekly SchoolStat meetings to discuss high-priority issues and what actions DCPS department managers need to take to improve performance. Similarly, the state superintendent's office uses weekly EdStat meetings to monitor progress in administration of federal grants and special education services. At EdStat meetings, managers analyze performance data, collaborate with program managers on remediation strategies, and monitor subsequent performance data to validate the effectiveness of actions taken. The State Superintendent plans to use EdStat meetings to monitor whether the office is meeting time frames for providing assistance to schools identified as in need of improvement under NCLBA.

Table 2: Performance-Based Education Meetings: Focus and Attendees

Meeting title (office responsible)	Meeting focus	Who attends the meetings
CapStat (Mayor's Office)	• CapStat meetings may pertain to the activities of any D.C. government office • CapStat meetings on education issues have included such topics as school security, facilities, special education transportation, and financial management issues	• D.C. Mayor • City Administrator • D.C. Chief Financial Officer • Head of General Counsel • Other D.C. agency heads, as appropriate (e.g., Chief of Police Dept. or Director of Transportation Dept.) • Deputy Mayor for Education • State Superintendent • DCPS Chancellor • Director of facilities office • CapStat director • Other CapStat support staff
SchoolStat (DCPS)	• SchoolStat meetings focus on key outcome and input data of D.C. public schools, including truancy, school security, facility work orders, responsiveness to constituents, and procurement	• DCPS Chancellor • Chiefs of DCPS departments, including Schools, Teaching and Learning, and Data and Accountability • SchoolStat manager
EdStat (State Superintendent's Office)	• EdStat meetings are currently focused on special education and federal grants management, with a future focus on schools that are in improvement status under NCLBA	• State Superintendent • Deputy superintendents • Chief of staff • EdStat director • EdStat data analyst

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by D.C. officials

In addition to weekly meetings, the Mayor's office requires education offices to develop and follow annual performance plans as another component of the accountability process. These performance plans include broad objectives, such as increasing student achievement, assessing the effectiveness of educational programs, and coordinating services with city agencies. In addition, the plans detail specific actions to achieve these objectives, and key performance indicators designed to measure progress. For example, regarding DCPS' 2007-2008 performance plan objective to increase student achievement, DCPS plans to provide training for teachers to help them make better use of student performance data. Similarly, regarding the State Superintendent's objective to provide educators with information needed to improve schools and to assess the

effectiveness of educational programs, the office plans to provide data from its longitudinal database to educators to help them determine where specialized programs are needed. The first performance plan for the facilities office is scheduled to be in place in November 2008.

The D.C. Department of Education has taken some steps to coordinate and integrate the various efforts of the District's education offices. The Deputy Mayor for Education told us that the department reviews the individual annual performance plans of education offices to ensure they are aligned and not working at cross-purposes. The department also uses CapStat meetings to monitor the progress of the education offices. In addition, according to the Deputy Mayor for Education, the department tracks the goals and activities of city youth agencies, such as the Child and Family Services Agency, to ensure they are consistent with the goals of the education offices.[27] D.C. Department of Education officials also told us they will take additional steps in the future. The Deputy Mayor will review each education office's long-term plan, such as the Chancellor's five year academic plan and the revised Master Facilities Plan, to ensure they are coordinated and implemented. The Deputy Mayor also told us that the department will rely on findings from annual evaluations of DCPS to assess the progress of the reform efforts.[28]

Officials with the D.C. Department of Education told us they have not yet developed a documented districtwide education strategic plan. According to department officials, they do not intend to develop a written plan at this time, in part, because they are addressing immediate and urgent issues. They questioned the need for a written document as opposed to a formalized process that would help ensure that the individual District education offices' long-term plans are coordinated and executed.

While developing a long-term strategic plan takes time, it is useful for entities undergoing a major transformation, such as the D.C. public school system. The District has a new public school governance structure and newly created education offices. A strategic plan, and the process of developing one, helps organizations look across the goals of multiple

[27]The Interagency Commission's goals include ensuring that children are ready for school, succeed in school, and make a successful transition into adulthood.

[28]The Reform Act requires the Mayor to submit to the D.C. Council an annual and independent evaluation of the progress of DCPS' business practices, human resources operations, and academic plans, as well as a detailed description of student achievements.

offices and determine whether they are aligned and connected or working at cross-purposes. By articulating an overall mission or vision, a strategic plan helps organizations set priorities, implementation strategies, and timelines to measure progress of multiple offices. A long-term strategic plan is also an important communication tool, articulating a consistent set of goals and marking progress for employees and key stakeholders, from legislative bodies to community organizations.

Conclusions

The problems in the D.C. public school system are long-standing. Past efforts to reform the system and ultimately raise student achievement have been unsuccessful. The Reform Act made many changes: new divisions of responsibility, improved oversight, and greater opportunity for the Chancellor to focus on academic progress. The Mayor and his education team recognized that before they could take full advantage of these changes, they would have to revamp the school system's basic infrastructure. Their initial efforts, including those to create a highly functional central office and repair school buildings to make them safe for students, provide some of the basics for successful learning environments. However, the Mayor and his team will need to sustain the momentum created over the last 6 months and focus as quickly as possible on the challenges that lie ahead—improving the reading and math skills of students and the instructional skills of teachers.

In addition, the Mayor and his team have taken steps to hold managers and staff accountable for improving the school system, such as holding weekly performance meetings, developing annual performance plans, and coordinating education activities. These changes form the cornerstone of the Mayor's effort to transform the organizational culture of the District's public education system. However, the Mayor's team has not yet developed a long-term districtwide strategic education plan. Given the significant transformation underway, a strategic plan could provide a framework for coordinating the work of the education offices and assessing short-term and long-term progress. Without a plan that sets priorities, implementation goals, and timelines, it may be difficult to measure progress over time and determine if the District is truly achieving success. Additionally, a districtwide strategic education plan would increase the likelihood that the District's education offices work in unison toward common goals and that resources are focused on key priorities, not non-critical activities. A strategic plan could also help determine when mid-course corrections are needed. Given that leadership changes, a strategic education plan would provide a road map for future district leaders by explaining the steps taken, or not taken, and why.

Recommendation to the Mayor of the District of Columbia

To help ensure the long-term success of the District's transformation of its public school system, we recommend that the Mayor direct the D.C. Department of Education to develop a long-term districtwide education strategic plan. The strategic plan should include certain key elements including a mission or vision statement, long-term goals and priorities, and approaches and time frames for assessing progress and achieving goals. It may also include a description of the relationship between the long-term strategic and annual performance goals. In addition, the strategic plan should describe how coordination is to occur among the District's education offices.

As you know Mr. Chairman, you have requested that we conduct a second, longer-term study of changes in D.C. schools' management and operations, and results of these changes. We will begin that study this month.

Comments from the D.C. Mayor's Office and District Education Offices

We provided a draft of this report to the offices of the Mayor and District education officials for review and comment, and on March 11, 2008, officials from the Mayor's office discussed their comments with us. They told us they support the need for an overarching strategy that integrates the efforts and plans of DCPS, the state superintendent's office, and the facilities office. They said that these offices are in the process of developing long-term strategic plans to serve as the foundation for an overall education strategy, and that the Deputy Mayor for Education is committed to coordinating and sustaining these efforts. Further, they noted that a districtwide strategy can take many forms, and that the Deputy Mayor's preferred approach is to develop a formal process, rather than a written document, to ensure efforts are coordinated and executed as efficiently as possible. They noted that in the past, plans were written, "put on a shelf," and never used.

We agree that the Deputy Mayor is taking steps to coordinate the individual plans of these offices, and that the Mayor's education team recognizes the importance of taking a strategic approach to address the educational needs of District students. However, as we have said in this statement, we see value in developing a documented strategy that could help the District's education leaders coordinate their efforts and goals, and provide future leaders the benefit of understanding what worked, what didn't, and why. While past administrations may have developed strategic plans and not used them, what is unknown is whether these plans could have been of value if they had been used. The current administration's development and implementation of an articulated documented strategy could provide a foundation that would help coordinate future efforts.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

GAO Contacts

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact me at (202) 512-7215. Individuals making key contributions to this testimony include Harriet Ganson, Elizabeth Morrison, Sheranda Campbell, Jeff Miller, Bryon Gordon, Susan Aschoff, Sheila McCoy, Sandy Silzer, Sarah Veale, Janice Latimer, and Terry Dorn.

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Testimony of Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

Meeting of the U.S. Senate Committee
on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs,
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich, Ranking Member

March 14, 2008
Foundations

Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich and members of the Subcommittee. When I last testified before you I said that I would rebuild the public school system in Washington, DC. I described plans to overhaul flawed data and accountability systems, create a culture of individual accountability for student achievement, build strong leadership and high quality teaching in our schools, reform special education and address multiple other areas to increase student achievement. As my evaluation of the system has deepened over the past eight months, I have been shocked by the profound level of dysfunction under which DCPS has been operating. I met high school seniors who want to go to college next year but had just learned about prepositions. I heard from teachers who had not been paid for work done three years ago. I met elementary school students who sent me a 'wish list' for their school. They asked if I could send them a music teacher, a Spanish teacher, a librarian, and other basics for which no young children should have to lobby their chancellor.

These are not just anecdotes. What saddens me most is what the performance data says about what this system is doing to kids. According to DC-CAS data, *fifty* of our schools have proficiency rates below 20% in either reading or math. This means that four out of five kids in those schools do not even meet the most basic level of proficiency. We're talking about almost 14,000 kids.

Residents of the District have rightly demanded radical change, and we are responding swiftly. In this transitional year we have begun to remove the obstacles that block student achievement. We are solving the problems that need to be solved, and I look forward to discussing this work today. However, this system needs more than solving problems one by one. This year we are laying the foundations for my long-term strategy, building our priorities and goals for the next five years. On these foundations we will build the system to give our kids the skills they need and the choices in life that they deserve.

Transition Year: Evaluation, Accomplishments

Creating Accountability in the Central Office

This year, after receiving multiple reports of problems in our central office, we have swiftly and aggressively moved to solve them. From former employees who were still receiving benefits and paychecks they could not explain, to teachers who had not been paid and parents who could not get an employee to return a phone call, there were so many issues to confront that I set up a constituent services team to help parents and school staff navigate the central office. I learned that many staff members did not have job descriptions and had never received a performance evaluation. We responded. I communicated the mayor's higher customer service standards to all employees, and lobbied for personnel legislation that would allow us to increase the efficiency of the central office as a whole and to create a culture of accountability. We are reorganizing the office so that people's skills and performance are best suited to their positions and office. We created job descriptions for all employees and conducted our first round of performance evaluations. We have previously non-responsive employees who—after one performance evaluation—are now working harder at their jobs. In the past four months our customer satisfaction rate with central office response has jumped from 41% to 59%, and I am confident that it will continue to improve.

Hiring and Retaining Quality School Leaders

Reforming DCPS requires that we have the best principals leading our schools. Previous DCPS recruiting has been minimal, but through a new principal recruitment campaign we are interviewing and identifying quality school leaders. We have already received close to 500 applications and we expect this number to grow as more prospective candidates begin considering their options for next year.

Recruitment is only half the task. To keep strong employees, leaders must recognize and reward good work. In the nation's capital it is time for us to back our words about respecting successful educators with the investment that will keep them in our schools. We started this year by utilizing federal funds to give TEAM Awards to schools that showed dramatic gains in student achievement, and my long-term plans aim to increase performance awards to teachers and schools.

Teacher Training: Professional Development to improve instruction

In the past, DCPS has not supported teachers by providing the training they need to drive instruction forward, and in a massive effort this year we are turning around professional development. Before, there was no consistency in the quality of instruction across the District, and parents were rightly frustrated by this disparity. Now, we are teaching our teachers how to use the best practices for reading and math instruction, making instruction consistent across the system.

Also, we are showing our teachers how to use test data to drive instruction, and abolishing the 'drill and kill' style of teaching often associated with standardized testing. For example, the reading portion of the DC-CAS measures students' ability to read for meaning, a skill that this District as a whole has failed to provide. We are training teachers to use 'constructed response' questions to teach children how to show reading comprehension through fully-developed written responses. This is not 'test prep.' It is good teaching that gives students the skills they will need as adults.

We are also providing a monthly professional development calendar full of options across the District. These options are aligned to the specific needs of teachers and students as identified through testing data, surveys and school observations. Not only will this help the District to track professional development for each teacher, it will support our teachers in honing their craft. Overall, our work in professional development this year increases our ability to retain the teachers we need, when too often in this field, isolation and a lack of support lead to preventable burnout.

Data: Systems and Alignment

Since I have arrived, I have received an education in just how severe our problems with data management and alignment are. An initial assessment revealed 27 disconnected data systems. An update in one location did not automate an update in other areas where similar information was stored. This affected even the most basic of operations. For example, in September when I attempted to send an email to teachers, my inbox filled with returns from defunct email accounts, and I was advised that I should back up the mailing with a paper letter sent through individual schools. Now, with

continued outreach to schools and new connected data systems, this long-standing communication problem is being corrected. Through a collaborative effort with HR, we have updated our teacher email list from 45% accuracy to about 75%. Also this year we worked with the city's Chief Technology Officer to install 5,900 PCs in our schools so that every DCPS classroom teacher has a working computer. They will use these computers to view student data, take attendance, conduct research, take advantage of professional development opportunities, and finally, receive my emails!

Streamlining our data systems is a massive undertaking that will occur over the next few years, and it is one of my highest priorities. In every area of DCPS my long-term objective is to use data as every good organization does: to improve performance. My Chief Data and Accountability Officer has been successful in streamlining these systems in other districts, and I am confident that our plans for the District's data systems will result in significant progress in our offices and classrooms.

School Improvement

Many schools had significant needs that require immediate attention this year. First, some of our schools are without psychologists, guidance counselors, school nurses, art or music teachers. Teachers are forced to attempt to provide services that they are not equipped to provide, especially when I need them focused on instruction. Our schools with low enrollment numbers are particularly hard to staff. Schools were paying to maintain unused space when we need that money to staff the school and provide strong programs. In November we introduced a plan to rightsize the school system and bring strong new academic initiatives and full staffing models to our schools over time. We are working through the remainder of the year and summer to prepare schools for upcoming transitions due to school closures and new programs.

We also have a number of schools that are not meeting Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). We are carefully assessing the options available under the law to make the right decisions for each school. We will use these assessments to create plans for each school, not only to correct problems but to align their programs with our longer term plans for success across the District.

Special Education

Special Education in this district has caused real and deep hardship for many students and families. I have not only been shocked by the mistakes that have led to the loss of millions of dollars that could have served instruction, but more importantly I have been saddened by the damage DCPS has done by over-identifying kids who should not be classified and by failing to support the children who do need services.

We have been aggressive about identifying the root of these problems and correcting them. To start, we will be working with the State Superintendent of Education to pilot mental health programs in middle schools; to introduce the comprehensive staffing model through the rightsizing plan next year (providing the staff to address students' social, emotional, and academic needs); and to reform our process for identifying students for special education services by accurately diagnosing learning needs. Our long-term strategies to raise student achievement levels include 8 new SAM (Schoolwide Applications Model) schools next year, which have shown tremendous success in urban districts to ensure high achievement for both disabled and non-disabled students. This system currently has a reputation for being the least inclusive in the country when it comes to our special education students; our focus now is to become an integrated, inclusive district where we are not segregating these students.

Engagement with Parents

Historically this system has not done well bringing parents into students' education. Our long-term plans will include the initiatives we need to engage parents in our work in schools. Many parents simply do not know what they can expect, demand or do to support their children through each stage of learning. Now, we are building the foundations to communicate clearly with parents about their children's progress and about important processes such as college applications. We are holding parent information sessions, opening Parent Resource Centers, conducting focus groups with parents, and increasing our commitment to translating and interpreting information for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse (LCD) parents.

Moving Forward

During this first transition year, I have identified the problems that have been blocking student achievement. We are solving the problems. Whether by rightsizing the system, speeding a slow bureaucracy, or improving our data systems, we are building the foundation for a system that works.

After this year we will move into the proactive long-term implementation strategy that will move us beyond correcting problems to creating model programs. I want a portfolio of quality schools in every ward, providing quality choices for all parents. I want a District that fosters a college-going culture in every ward, allowing our students to be as competitive for college as any other students in the nation. Clearly we are far from seeing the results I want today. But as I approach the closing months of this year of transition, I remain determined and confident that we will see them.

ON THE PATH TO GREAT RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE HONORABLE DANIEL K. AKAKA, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, RANKING MEMBER

TESTIMONY OF VICTOR REINOSO
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION

MARCH 14, 2008

Good morning Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and members of the subcommittee. I appear before you today to report on the progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the Mayor's public education reform initiatives and on the strategies we are developing to continue that momentum going forward. First, however, I must say how incredibly proud I am of the team that Mayor Fenty has put together to lead the agencies where this work is happening, and of the job each of them has done thus far to respond to the Mayor's charge that we not just reform, but really remake, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and that we do this as quickly as humanly possible. As you will hear in the testimony, each of them – at DCPS, the new Office of the State Superintendent for Education, and the Office of Public Education Facilities Management – already has made great strides to address critical problems within their agencies (in some cases more progress than had been seen in many years before this team took charge) and, at the same time, they are developing the long-term strategic plans that will guide us towards continued, systemic improvement in the future.

The District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 enabled the Mayor to embark on a sweeping array of initiatives and reforms to the city's education system, some of which have already begun to fundamentally change our approach to public education in the District. My office was established to oversee all of those efforts and to ensure that the entire District government – including both our education and non-education agencies – moves forward coherently and in alignment towards our shared goal: ensuring the success of every student. I also have been charged by the Mayor with marshalling all of the District's resources – public, private, and in the community – to improve the educational processes and outcomes for all the District's students to prepare them for successful futures. Thus, while each of the District

witnesses who follows me will describe his or her own strategic plan to move us toward this goal within the scope of their agency's mission and capabilities, I will discuss the role of my office in coordinating these plans, and, as importantly, ensuring that the human and other resources are available to support their execution.

Progress to date

To accomplish this critical task, I have organized the office around four broad activities:

- Coordination of a District-wide educational strategy that meets the needs of students, parents, and the community across the education life-cycle (from early childhood to adult education)
- Coordination and direction of high-quality services and programs that reach across city agencies and educational institutions to improve child and youth outcomes;
- Development of robust partnerships with community based organizations and the private sector that provide the District's education system with critical new resources ; and
- Leadership and support to Office of the State Superintendent, Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and Ombudsman.

We are moving forward successfully on several fronts, which I will discuss briefly here.

Coordinating A District-wide Education Strategy

When we set out to improve our public education system, the Mayor made a foundation decision to attack the problem comprehensively. The Administration views education as a continuum

from birth into adulthood – learning is always taking place and access to quality educational opportunities must exist at every level. Also, it is not enough to transform what happens in the classroom; to succeed, we also must meet needs students bring from outside the classroom. As a government, the District must bring to bear all of the resources of its public and private sectors – in a coordinated manner – to support children and learning in order to create an environment in which they can succeed.

My office is well-positioned not only to think strategically about the direction of the District's education reform efforts, but also to address specific challenges and tackle special projects that support implementation of the plan. We are able to take on work that will enable the Chancellor and State Superintendent to be more effective in their efforts. For example, my staff has played a leadership role in planning around how to align our education-related infrastructure and resources with outcome-driven priorities (including the rapid closure of key service gaps). This work is continuous and correlates directly with the top priorities of the Mayor.

Most recently, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education has been leading the planning and coordination around the school facilities consolidation effort, which has been driven by the Administration's view that school buildings, as public assets, should be used in the most efficient manner possible to serve the overall District strategy for delivering high-quality educational services to residents. In this role, my office provided capacity to the Chancellor and her team around analyzing data, creating strategies for replacing underperforming programs with ones that will be attractive to families, engaging the community in this process, and, ultimately, developing recommendations for the DCPS school reorganization plan. This joint effort led to a

proposal that will enable the Chancellor to drive resources down to the classroom *and* provide higher quality academic services to students across the city.

While the Chancellor and her team lead the school system through its transformation to a system of academic excellence, my team will continue to plan and develop policy for the most appropriate utilization of the excess school facility space. Specifically, by combining our planning efforts with development plans for the city as a whole, we can take fuller advantage of the tremendous opportunities that exist to provide additional public education and city services and supports for students and families.

In addition, because we approach the reform agenda from a big-picture perspective, we can identify gaps in academic and support services and work with the agencies to close those gaps. One example of this is our work with DCPS on the development and implementation of an alternative high school model. This project began with the identification of the need for an alternative strategy for reaching older students who are at risk, either academically or because of school attendance and/or discipline issues, of dropping out or not graduating with a diploma. As an education strategy, an alternative high school program is necessary to meet these students where they are and get them back on track. And as an interagency strategy, it will be a useful tool in combating drop out and further at-risk behaviors among older youth. While we are still in the planning stages, my office has scanned best practices, identified the universe of potential partners, and identified possible sites for moving the project forward.

As noted above, the Mayor's education initiative is being pursued on numerous fronts, and my office is uniquely positioned to guide those efforts without being involved in the day-to-day management and operations of the education agencies. This allows us to aggressively pursue particular high priority initiatives, restructure and reorganize services, and manage agency performance while keeping an eye on the big picture. Our relationship with OSSE and OPEFM illustrates this approach. I have two goals in mind as I oversee their work: ensuring they have the resources necessary and the support from other agencies to be successful and ensuring that their efforts are aligned with the Mayor's overall education reform agenda.

With OSSE, there are two looming priorities: aggressively tackling problems in our special education system and addressing our high-risk designation for Federal grants. We also are working closely with OSSE on implementation of its comprehensive student data warehouse and tracking system, strengthening our parent involvement mechanisms as a state, and supporting, with strong expectations of accountability, DCPS and public charter schools as they work to restructure or address deficiencies in student achievement.

OPEFM has a more narrowly defined, though no less daunting, task: repair, maintain, renovate, modernize, and construct as many of our school facilities as quickly, efficiently, and effectively as possible. OPEFM's job is to execute; they execute according to a capital budget and a facilities plan. We are working with OPEFM to revise the Facilities Master Plan, aligning it with a reorganized school system, more strategic delivery of education services, and budget realities. Also, we will work with OPEFM to ensure that we have a workable plan for stabilizing the rest

of the school system facility inventory and getting all schools, particularly those receiving students through the Chancellor's reorganization plan, ready for opening in the fall.

Integrating Government Services in Support of Educational Success

A second critically important function of my office is to lead and coordinate the activities of the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC), a panel created by the Mayor's Education Reform legislation and comprised of the agency heads from over 20 agencies that touch the lives of children and families, from the Child and Family Services Administration and the Department of Health to the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services and the Metropolitan Police Department. ICSIC has a unique ability to identify new ways that we as a government can increase the chances of success for our students. To guide this work, the ICSIC adopted six citywide goals for youth to focus our conversations. They are:

1. Children are ready for school.
2. Children and youth succeed in school.
3. Children and youth are healthy and practice healthy behaviors.
4. Children and youth engage in meaningful activities.
5. Children and youth live in healthy, stable, and supportive families.
6. All youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

The ICSIC has now completed its first round of meetings on each of the six youth development goals, and last month we reviewed progress on the first goal, Children Are Ready For School. We have accomplished the following around this goal thus far:

- Developed a definition for school preparedness.
- Developed a school preparedness assessment, which will be piloted in 50 preK and 50 kindergarten classrooms in April and May, with a planned city-wide rollout next fall.
- Tracking infant health indicators, including birth weight, blood lead levels, and immunization rates across the District.

We have laid the groundwork for progress on the other goals and I expect similar accomplishments. More importantly, we're seeing a real commitment and buy-in from the agencies toward this kind of integrated approach that we haven't seen before.

Through ICSIC, my staff also is working on the pilot implementation of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary assessment instrument that will identify at-risk youth, provide therapeutic interventions, and assist in the development of integrated service plans for these children. This was identified in the Public Education Reform Act as one of the key deliverables of the ICSIC. Its development has involved establishing an information-sharing agreement between numerous agencies that never existed before and the creation of a database for monitoring student cases. We are working with the Chancellor to identify the pilot schools where the project will be introduced first, with a plan to begin in two schools this April and four or five more in August.

Public-Private Partnerships in Support of Education Reform

Finally, the work of my office in the development of partnerships takes on many facets: meeting with organizations seeking to support the Mayor's education reform efforts; tracking down and developing new partnership relationships, reviewing existing partnerships to better understand

coverage and gaps and to determine their effectiveness in moving us towards our strategic goals, and enhancing the scope of existing successful partnerships to reach even more students. Since October, my office has met with over 30 organizations. Seven of those meetings led to new partnerships, including partnerships with the Ford Motor Co., the National Institutes of Health, and the Washington Performing Arts Society. I believe the success of these meetings is evidence that the Administration has communicated effectively with external stakeholders about our commitment and strategic approach to improving education in the District, and shows that there are many, many people in the private and non-profit sectors who are ready to help, so long as they feel that their efforts are part of a larger plan to move forward.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share with you the progress the District is making in reaching its goals for education reform. I look forward to your questions.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education
3-14-08

ON THE PATH TO GREAT RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

THE HONORABLE DANIEL K. AKAKA, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, RANKING MEMBER

TESTIMONY OF DEBORAH A. GIST
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MARCH 14, 2008

Office of the State Superintendent of Education
3-14-08

Good morning Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich, distinguished members of the committee, committee staff and guests. I am Deborah Gist and I serve as the State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia. I am pleased to be here this morning to discuss the progress that the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) has made since I was last here to brief you in July 2007.

I want to begin by emphasizing that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education fully embraces and takes seriously our role as stewards of federal dollars and we are committed to ensuring that we develop the proper systems and foundations that will allow our local education agencies (LEAs) to be successful in significantly enhancing student achievement. It is clear that we have a long road of reform ahead of us, but the OSSE is deeply committed to ensuring that we move quickly and transparently to put in place the foundational components necessary to spur lasting change. My testimony today will focus on those foundational efforts, from the development of our strategic plan and State-wide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse, to our efforts around federal grants management reform and ensuring accountability across the state office and across our LEAs in the District of Columbia.

As a result of the *DC Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007* and our Mayoral approved transition plan, a plan that identified the OSSE's timeline for the transfer of the District of Columbia's state education agency functions, the Office of the State Superintendent received state-level authority on October 1, 2007 – a little over five months ago. While extracting these functions out of several existing government agencies was an incredibly complex task, I am pleased to report that the initial transition of these responsibilities occurred successfully—on time and on target with the objectives that were identified in our plan. We are now moving forward with the transfer of the District's early childhood education functions, a transfer that will be complete on April 1, 2008, as well as with the transfer of our non-public tuition and special education transportation responsibilities, both of which are being targeted for transfer at the conclusion of fiscal year 2008.

For far too long the District of Columbia failed to carry out its state-level education responsibilities in a way that provided the proper level of LEA supports and interventions and failed to capture the level of accountability that is necessary in the era of standards based reform. At the same time, the role of the state became even more critical in education governance across the country. As such, we are structuring the OSSE to reflect national best practices with the ultimate goal of becoming a model for state-level education leadership in the 21st century. To achieve this vision, we are working to set the policy systems and conditions within which our schools can dramatically work to close the achievement gap and improve student performance. We are striving to achieve our core responsibilities of setting state policy by establishing academic standards that are aligned with college and workforce readiness expectations; providing the resources and supports to assist LEAs in achieving these objectives; intervening when necessary to hold LEAs accountable for performance against the state standards; and providing accurate and reliable data to policy makers, our community, our LEAs, the federal government and other stakeholders to drive decision making.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education
3-14-08

State-Level Strategic Plan

In seeking to implement these core beliefs, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education has developed a draft strategic plan framework, which will ultimately lead to a five year strategic plan and will serve as a strong foundational guide for our reform efforts. We believe that having this long term strategy in place will be critical to achieving sustainable reform. The OSSE has identified four central long-term goals and several related strategic objectives that will serve as benchmarks for agency progress and performance, including a central focus on the following: 1) All Children are Ready for School; 2) Every Neighborhood has a High Quality Place of Learning; 3) Residents are Successful in Postsecondary Education and the Workforce; and 4) Students Receive the Necessary Supports to Allow Them to be Successful in School. While this work is still in development, I am pleased to share with you some of the work we have done to date around these priorities.

The first of our strategic goals is to ensure that all children are ready for school. Specifically, we need to ensure that we are providing constituents with high-quality early childhood learning settings, early intervention for children who are at-risk, access to quality Pre-Kindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds and adequate public resources to sustain these quality programs. To achieve this objective, the OSSE has led the effort to develop a school readiness definition[1] as well as an assessment pilot that will be rolled out this spring that will allow for a greater understanding of the skills our children have upon entering the classroom and what skills need to be more closely developed in the pre-K setting prior to entering kindergarten. The OSSE is also working with the State Board of Education to develop a comprehensive teacher quality strategy that will include evaluating our certification requirements for pre-K classrooms with a special emphasis on enhancing our ability to obtain quality instructors. In addition, the OSSE will be developing quality pre-K standards for 3-year-olds to supplement our current early learning standards for 4-year-olds as well as standards for programs that focus on children 0 to 3 years old.

The second strategic goal that will guide our work is to ensure that every neighborhood has high quality places of learning. Our key objectives around this goal include: 1) setting state academic standards that are rigorous and aligned with college and workforce readiness expectations; 2) developing and implementing a robust system of accountability including comprehensive state assessments that are aligned with state academic standards and a strong system of supports and interventions to assist LEAs in improving student outcomes; 3) ensuring that educators at all levels are of the highest caliber; and 4) identifying and disseminating best practices research.

The OSSE has already engaged in a number of activities in an effort to advance this goal. One such activity has been our collaborative work with the State Board of Education, DCPS and the public charter schools to develop a draft of the state's restructuring rubric, a tool that will be used to assess the restructuring plans that will ultimately be submitted to the state for review. The No Child Left Behind restructuring classification poses a significant challenge as well as a significant opportunity to our work at the state and LEA levels. This year, 31 of our public schools are in the planning year for restructuring with a significantly greater number of schools

[1] School readiness is the knowledge, skills and dispositions that children demonstrate in (1) Approaches to Learning; (2) Social and Emotional Development; (3) Language and Literacy; (4) Mathematical Thinking; (5) Social Studies; (6) Creative Arts; and (7) Physical Health Development, Health and Safety, as they enter Kindergarten.

expected to reach this status next year. Our success in education reform rests largely on our efforts to improve educational outcomes for our students in our lowest performing schools.

Achieving significant turnaround in our public schools requires the state to also provide comprehensive supports to our LEAs and to provide our LEAs with the tools they need to implement targeted learning opportunities for our students. One area under exploration in this regard is the development of alternatives to the District's formative assessment currently given to DC students to regularly assess academic progress throughout the school year. One of the major tools we plan to provide to our LEAs is a bank of sample items for each education standard. This would allow LEAs to effectively create, administer and use tailor-made formative assessments to help meet individual student needs as well as give LEAs a tool for instructional planning at the school level.

Another area in which we have been significantly engaged is trying to closely align our teacher quality standards to the federal law and to enhance our ability to attract teachers of the highest caliber to the District of Columbia. As such, we have presented an enhanced "highly qualified teacher" definition to the State Board of Education for their consideration. In addition, we are seeking to overhaul our teacher and administrator certification requirements in a number of areas to ensure quality while also allowing classroom access to outstanding individuals who can bring innovation, creativity and results to our students.

The third major goal that will guide our work is to ensure that all DC residents are prepared for and successful in postsecondary education and the workforce and that they have essential 21st century skills. To achieve this goal the OSSE will seek to employ several key strategies, including strengthening pathways and expanding opportunities for residents to gain entry into post-secondary education; ensuring that adult learners have access to high quality adult education providers; and providing resources and counseling to residents attending post-secondary institutions.

One of the most significant commitments that the OSSE has made to external stakeholders is around our efforts to double the number of students graduating from college in five years. This will require significantly strengthening the pathways from our Pre-K system to our K-12 and higher education systems. We are expanding our outreach efforts for our college tuition assistance programs such as the DC Tuition Assistance Grant (DCTAG) program to reach as many students as possible in the District of Columbia and to ensure that they have the resources that they need to stay in school and complete their degrees.

The fourth and final major goal on which the OSSE is focusing is ensuring that students receive the necessary supports they need to be successful in school. Some of the major strategies that the OSSE is seeking to employ to achieve this goal include providing program support to LEAs to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate and inclusive services, providing support to LEAs to ensure that English Language Learners receive appropriate services; providing assistance to LEAs in implementing state health standards; and revising DC nutritional guidelines to surpass minimum federal standards for implementing nutrition service programs.

More broadly, however, this goal is also focused on engaging parents so that they are better able to support their child's educational achievement. The OSSE has established a parental engagement effort to ensure that our students and families receive high-quality services and supports at the state level. As such, the OSSE will provide information, resources, training and technical assistance to parents, volunteers, and schools to support the range of high-quality educational programs and services that contribute to student success. The OSSE is also working with the State Board of Education to develop state-wide regulations for home schooling. The proposed regulations focus on several key areas and are designed to ensure that the District has the tools necessary to perform our responsibilities to our residents.

Federal Grants Management Reform

In addition to developing our strategic plan, we have also been focusing on several critical areas of reform, including reforming our federal grants management process. As you know, the District of Columbia was designated as a "high risk grantee" by the US Department of Education in 2006 for federal grants management. As a result of the "high risk grantee" designation, the District has been placed under a US Department of Education corrective action plan to address the concerns that had been repeatedly identified over the course of several years. Since receiving authority for the SEA functions in October, we have taken several critical steps to elevate the federal grant reform effort and have begun the process if implementing sufficient financial controls on our federal dollars. We have also begun implementing a number of programmatic reforms including: 1) providing technical assistance to LEAs such as workshops and trainings on program implementation; 2) ensuring adequate oversight over the use of federal funds through LEA monitoring; 3) developing and refining our financial monitoring systems to ensure fiscal compliance; 4) increasing grants management accountability through the development of state evaluation protocols; 5) ensuring extensive collaboration with the LEAs around our reform efforts in order to provide maximum leveraging of our federal dollars, and 6) ensuring efficient fund allocation and distribution systems to ensure that federal funds ar allocated and distributed in a more expedited manner – a recurring failure of our system.

Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse

In addition to federal grants reform, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, in partnership with our key education stakeholders, is developing the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED) – a key foundational component of our reform efforts. The data warehouse will be the main repository of current and historical public education student data in the District of Columbia and will be used for education analysis, research and reporting purposes. The data warehouse will be populated with information extracted from disparate enterprise educational systems into a single comprehensive relational database. It will standardize student academic information currently stored in various local education agencies and track student information statewide over multiple years and in multiple education institutions.

Thus far, we have succeeded in producing a unique student identifier and creating a monthly student tracking system for public education students in the District of Columbia. We have enhanced this interim student tracking system to include richer and more advanced data. This

data includes information on each student's grade level, where students are enrolled, student exit dates and – where applicable – a student's special education status, or a student's English Language Learner status. In addition, we have mapped all of this information to scores on the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System so that we can not only obtain a picture of mobility, but also of student achievement and how the two factors are related.

Internal Accountability

The most critical element that the OSSE is seeking to implement in order to achieve our strategic objectives and critical action reforms is a culture of accountability. As such, we have moved quickly to establish clear expectations for all staff within the agency. As a result, each OSSE employee now has a manager approved performance management plan in place for which results will be regularly measured. I intend on holding all employees accountable to their specified performance objectives and goals and believe it is critical that we manage based on these established expectations. Perhaps our emphasis on accountability is most apparent, however, in our EdStat process. EdStat is a data-driven tool that the OSSE uses to monitor and improve performance across the agency. This tool results in a management technique that fosters ownership for results through sustained and relentless follow-up and action. It is important to note that while similar tools have been employed elsewhere in the country, the OSSE is the first state education agency in the country to utilize this results-oriented and cutting-edge management technique.

It is clear that we have a long road ahead of us as we drive toward reform in our education system. There is no greater civil rights challenge than ensuring that our children receive the quality education they deserve. I take the responsibility that has been entrusted to me very seriously, and the team members at the OSSE do as well. We are going to need hard work, relentless drive, fresh ideas and a collective city-wide effort that includes parents, teachers, community members and public servants. I am confident that providing the proper foundations of reform through our federal grants management reform efforts and data warehouse development efforts will lead to visible progress in our education system. We will ultimately be judged, however, by student success and achievement outcomes. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education is fully committed to that result.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on our progress and the direction of our agency this morning and I look forward to answering your questions.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FACILITIES MODERNIZATION

Testimony of

Allen Y. Lew, Executive Director
D.C. Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization

Before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

On

"On the Path to Great Results for the District's Public Schools"

Friday, March 14, 2008
10:00 a.m.

Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 342

Good morning Chairman Akaka and members of the sub-committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. For the record, my name is Allen Lew and I am the Executive Director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, which I will refer to during my statement as "School Construction".

School Construction was established by D.C. Act 17-38, the "Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007," and is responsible for the renovation and rehabilitation of existing District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) facilities, the construction of new schools and facilities and the development of a revised Master Facilities Plan for DCPS.

During the same period of time that we were establishing School Construction, we were engaged in pushing forward on several initiatives aimed at quality of life issues necessary to support a classroom environment that is conducive to learning and where a quality education can be obtained.

These initiatives – the DCPS Athletic Fields Renovations, Summer Blitz, Targeted Repairs, Fire and Health Code Violations and the Heating Blitz Program – concentrated on the most glaring deficiencies affecting DCPS facilities when the Mayor took control of the system.

The Athletic Fields Renovations project involved renovating six DCPS senior high school football fields: Dunbar, Coolidge, Roosevelt, McKinley, Wilson, and Ballou. We installed the same artificial turf on those fields that is used by many National Football League football stadiums and by Division I college football teams. In addition to the athletic fields, the renovations included field lights, repairs to bleachers, installation of press boxes and locker rooms. Running tracks made from the same composite materials that will be used at the Summer Olympics were also installed. Field event areas for high jump, pole vault, shot put and long jump were included in the design. These long-needed renovations are a source of pride for the schools and the surrounding community.

The Summer Blitz and Targeted Repairs programs, which involved 70 schools, focused on urgently-needed repairs to schools that involved roofs, gutters and leaders, bathroom plumbing issues, carpet and tile replacement and installation of new windows. The effort to remediate fire and health code violations involves the installation of fire alarm systems, installation of new door locks, cameras and security monitoring systems.

The Heating Blitz program addressed the conditions of the boilers providing heat to DCPS schools. While there are 142 schools, the boilers

serving these schools number some 411, and each school required at least one boiler providing heat by October 15th, which is the official beginning of the cold season. We've also been working on the distribution systems in an effort to better regulate the level of heat in individual classrooms.

I am pleased to report that we have successfully implemented each of these urgent-need initiatives. At the same time, I'm proud to say that we've been able to undertake significant management reforms since I last appeared before the Subcommittee, while also preparing for major new construction initiatives this Spring and Summer. I would like to provide a few comments on what we've achieved in this area and where we're headed:

Organizational Reforms

- Set up an office from scratch in under 2 weeks to manage the summer blitz and targeted repairs work and athletic fields renovations.
- Drafted and published new procurement regulations.
- Drafted new personnel regulations.
- Competitively procured a Program Management team that provides roughly 22 FTEs to augment School Construction and OFM's staff.
- Conducted an audit/review of DCPS-OFM's former structures and weaknesses.
- Assumed responsibility for DCPS-OFM maintenance functions.
- Engaged a management consultant to develop state of the art procurement, human resources and file/information management systems.
- Began the process of transitioning former OFM personnel into School Construction.

Modernization Projects Planning and Implementation

- Former culture of project management has been "jolted awake" by replacement of the Hardy Middle School Project Management and Construction Management contractors as well as the Savoy Elementary School Pre-Construction contractor
- All renovation and new construction project budgets have been reviewed and "right-sized", to accurately reflect probable actual costs
- All projects, and we have some 20 of them in various stages of design, preconstruction and construction, are moving forward

Work Orders/System Enhancements

- As a result of the focused Summer Blitz and Targeted Repair programs at 70 schools from June to October 2007, we substantially reduced the backlog of Maintenance Work Orders.
- We are currently in the process of clearing those closed work orders from the reporting system.
- As part of the upcoming Stabilization Program, it is anticipated that the remaining open work orders will be eliminated.
- We have established a rudimentary triage system, which we are constantly upgrading, to create the capacity to quickly address emergency service order requests

Air-Conditioning Blitz

- A solicitation in the form of a Request For Proposal (RFP) to provide air-conditioning in all classrooms by this spring was issued and contracts have been awarded to three construction firms
- Preliminary engineering and conditions assessments are underway to determine the level of electrical service required for each school

Stabilization and School Consolidation Program

- We are about to initiate a Stabilization Program that will focus on 70 schools that were not touched by the Summer Blitz and Targeted Repairs programs last year
- Between the end of the school year and the opening of schools in the fall, School Construction will prepare schools to receive additional students and new educational programs

- For the schools that are being closed, School Construction is developing a plan to insure the integrity of the building systems and to secure the buildings.

Master Facilities Plan

We are working with the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and the Chancellor to refine school/grade configurations across the system, prioritize facility delivery, and identify systemic efficiencies that will allow us to move more students into new and modernized school buildings faster, with the objective of presenting a revised Master Facilities Plan, that is fully aligned with the Chancellor's academic vision, to the public and the Council by the end of May.

Before that time, we will complete the following analyses:
In addition to the data used to develop the educational specifications for the Chancellor's school consolidation plan, much of the data developed in the 2006 Master Facilities Planning effort is still relevant. The facility assessments were revalidated in 2007 and that information assisted us in the heating and electrical "blitzes" that we have undertaken. The demographic data is being revalidated now and will be integral in confirming projected school sizes. Finally, the specific school-by-school recommendations are being reviewed and re-estimated to ensure the plan is financially sound.

We will incorporate the most effective combination of rehabilitation and new construction in the revised Master Plan. This approach will allow us to align the modernization with the academic programs planned for each school and also address the District's historic preservation and Green energy-efficient building goals.

I am excited to be working with Mayor Fenty, Deputy Mayor Reinoso, Chancellor Rhee, the principals, parents and, most importantly, the students and the larger community to construct new schools and modernize existing school facilities so that they can become centers of education, recreation and community life. The Mayor has made clear his goal of having excellent schools, and school buildings, across the District and he and the Deputy Mayor have been very helpful in eliminating bureaucratic obstacles to ensure our success in this respect.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I look forward to answering any questions that you and members of the Committee may have.

Testimony

Before the

Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

By

Jane Hannaway, Ph.D.
Director, Education Policy Center, Urban Institute
Director, CALDER (National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research)

March 14, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for inviting me to comment on school reform in the District of Columbia. I am happy to share my thoughts, not only as a researcher who has analyzed education reforms for almost three decades, but also as a resident of the District of Columbia. The views expressed are my own and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

The failures of the District's schools are legendary and need not be repeated here. The basic presumption behind the current reforms defined in P.L. 110-33 is that accountability matters. Prior to the school system's takeover by the mayor, the accountability structure was distributed across a number of authorities. One could argue the structure was Byzantine. Overlapping areas of responsibility provided all players with reason to blame each other when things went wrong, and left none of them with sufficient authority to demand quality performance.

Mayor Fenty should be applauded for his willingness to take responsibility for the schools. Reforming city schools is not for the faint of heart; the political costs can be high, and improved student achievement is not easily achieved.

Success in schools will take more than governance changes. Governance reforms may help establish conditions necessary for the system to operate well. For example, recent actions in the District associated with special education, school closings, and reductions in staff may well promote system efficiency. But reforms closer to the classroom are necessary for better student learning.

I would like to stress two areas in my comments: *teacher quality* and *data systems*. I see these two areas as closely related in basic and practical ways, as I explain below.

I lead a national research center called CALDER, the National Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (http://www.caldercenter.org), funded by the U.S. Department of Education and headquartered at the Urban Institute. We use administrative data in a number of states, including North Carolina, Florida, and Texas, and New York, to analyze factors that promote student learning, especially the link between individual student success and teacher characteristics.

The findings emerging on teacher effectiveness are stunning. Teachers are, by far, the most important school factor contributing to student achievement. Parents, principals, and other teachers have long known teachers can make a difference. But what is surprising is that the

variation across teachers in effectiveness—as measured by students' tested learning gains—is huge. The most effective teachers (top 15 percent) are about three times as effective as the least effective teachers (bottom 15 percent). Imagine the consequences for a student of having a highly effective, or a highly ineffective, teacher for several consecutive years. One study by a CALDER researcher estimates that if disadvantaged students had highly effective teachers for five years in a row, the achievement gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" would be closed.

The difficult tasks for District of Columbia policymakers and education administrators are how to get more high-performing teachers in the classroom (especially classrooms serving the most disadvantaged students), how to hold teachers and schools accountable for student performance, and how to do it fairly.

The answers are heavily dependent on good data systems. A big part of the problem in education is that the standard measures of teacher quality that are built into our current hiring practices and pay schedules—such as certification status, experience (beyond the first few years), and advanced degree (except in subject matter taught)—do not predict effectiveness in the classroom well. They simply do not distinguish more and less effective teachers.

Many efforts are underway in the District and across the country to rethink how we train, select, assign and reward teachers to promote greater student learning. Increased reliance on new recruitment strategies, such as the New Teacher Project and Teach for America; new compensation and reward programs, such as pay for performance and National Board

Certification; and new efforts to assign the best and the brightest teachers to schools where they are most needed are at the top of many state and local reform agendas.

Implementing such reforms on a wish and a prayer, however, is not fair to school professionals and, most importantly, to students. Reforms that promote teacher effectiveness should no doubt be tried, but reforms should be guided by data systems that provide feedback on how well the reforms are doing and how they might be fine tuned.

An important effort underway in the District of Columbia is a $25 million investment by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education for a longitudinal administrative data system that will enable the District to track student performance over time and to link the results to particular teachers. I have been serving on the panel reviewing proposals to develop the system, and I am very hopeful about the quality of the data system that will result.

While administrative data systems cannot tell you everything about the effect of different types of teachers, programs, and policies on student achievement, a first-rate system can tell you much. Proper analysis is, of course, key since technical issues abound when estimating effects and it is important to get it right. Administrative data systems can also provide early warning signals to administrators and teachers about which teachers and students are in trouble and need support. If properly structured, such a system can provide ongoing feedback to individual teachers about the performance of individual students in their classrooms and thereby help guide instructional efforts. In addition, such information can help depoliticize what should be objective managerial

decisions, based squarely on effects on student learning, about teacher policies, programs, and resource allocation.

I suggest six specific recommendations for the District's schools:

- Be open to teacher candidates coming with non-traditional teacher training backgrounds, such as the New Teacher Project and Teach for America, as well as talented individuals in areas of teacher shortage, such as math and science.
- Provide an intensive orientation and support structure, including performance feedback, for all new teachers for at least two years, regardless of their background.
- Develop school, principal, and teacher performance incentive programs based on student learning gains.
- Develop differentiated pay schedules to attract the best teachers to the most challenging schools and talented individuals in shortage areas.
- Move the teacher tenure decision out to five years, rather than the current two years, so that the decision can be based on more information about teacher performance.
- Encourage the involvement of objective professional analysts in research using the District's administrative data and compare findings with other jurisdictions. To ensure their best use, the data should be protected from an overly conservative interpretation of FERPA (Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act) that has inhibited research in some states.

In summary, when it comes to K-12 education, it is largely about teachers, teachers, teachers. The recommendations I offered need much detail before they could be effectively implemented, but the details right now are less important than the commitment to improve teacher performance and to let decisions be guided by objective information about what works.

On the Path to Great Results for the District Public Schools

Testimony of
Mr. John W. Hill
Chief Executive Officer
Federal City Council

Presented to
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich, Ranking Member

Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 342
Friday, March 14, 2008
10:00 AM

Good morning, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and other members of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia. I am John Hill, Chief Executive Officer of the Federal City Council. The Federal City Council is a non-profit organization comprised of approximately 250 business and civic leaders in the D.C. area, all of whom are focused on creating strong partnerships between the District and the business community to benefit District residents. I am pleased to be here before you today to present testimony regarding the performance of the D.C. Public Schools under its new structure and under the new leadership of Mayor Adrian Fenty and his team.

The Federal City Council was created in 1954 as a mechanism for the business community to organize and participate meaningfully in the civic progress of the District of Columbia. Over the past five decades, there have been a number of complex and challenging projects that the Council has embraced as critical to revitalizing downtown, providing housing, improving public safety, or strengthening neighborhoods. However, as many of our members have come to realize, it has become clear that the foundation for the District's future success is our public education system. The decades-long neglect of D.C. public schools has produced and perpetuated, in my opinion, the ills that persist in many pockets of the District: crime, illiteracy, substance abuse, joblessness, welfare dependency, income inequality, and poverty. When you have a city that has prospered as D.C. has, especially over the past ten years, the neglect and inequality that has resulted from our broken education system are more than evident. For this reason, public education reform has been a top priority for the Federal City Council for many years.

In 1989, the Federal City Council formed the Committee on Public Education (COPE), at the request of the D.C. Board of Education and the Superintendent, and in partnership with the D.C. Council and Mayor. At the time, the school system had 88,000 students. We were seeing four out of ten teenagers drop-out of school before graduation. Those children who did graduate were two years behind in reading and math. Our graduates had difficulty getting the jobs created in the District. This sounds all too familiar to our current condition. COPE brought together 64 individuals, representing the civic community, business community, educational institutions, and national education experts to recommend a path forward for school reform. Our report, issued that year, set forth recommendations. These included recommendations to modernize school facilities; reduce administrative overhead; streamline the central office; upgrade principal and teacher training; provide incentive pay for superior teachers; strengthen programs and standards in reading, writing, and math; expand the use of technology in the classroom; and begin to focus more on at-risk children at the ages of 3 to 6 years old.

At the time, the work of COPE had helped to establish a broad base of support for school reform, but these recommendations were never advanced, due primarily to the dire financial conditions that developed in the early 1990s and reached a crisis point mid-decade. Ultimately, we learned that, in order to realize real school reform, change has to be embraced and led by District partners, and this did not come to fruition. The tremendous momentum behind education reform among members of our organization stayed strong, and some of it was directed into a new charter school movement that began to take hold. The Federal City Council started a D.C. Public Charter School Resource Center to assist with this effort, and today, it is clear that many D.C. parents have opted to place their children in a public charter school rather than in a more traditional public school setting. While this has contributed to the decline in D.C. Public School enrollment and its financial resources, public charter schools have become an option for parents and students seeking a better education.

Over the past decade, our organization has stayed close to the changes and reform efforts of the public school system, but it was Mayor Adrian Fenty who placed education reform front and center for the District. The Federal City Council strongly supported his efforts last year to gain responsibility for school reform, and we helped to raise funds for this initiative. Not surprisingly, we were re-introduced to many of the same alarming indicators of student performance that we had seen twenty years ago. We feel that, because the Mayor has made school reform his top priority, the window of opportunity is now open to produce real and lasting reform. No one knows how long this window will remain open, so we fully support the District's moving quickly to set a solid foundation for the future. The costs of moving slowly, at this point, are too high, and these costs will be borne mostly by our children.

We have worked with the Mayor's leadership team over the past year as well. Deborah Gist has shown herself to be an energetic, competent, motivating and determined State Superintendent of Education, who has embraced the challenge and new responsibilities she has been given. Allen Lew has been a familiar face

to us because of his outstanding work with the Washington Convention Center and the new Nationals ballpark, and we believe that he is the right person to bring school facilities up to a standard of excellence. The person we are working with most closely is Chancellor Michelle Rhee, and this is because we know she has the toughest road to travel and many more storms to weather if we are truly going to see an improvement in the school system. Overall, we think the leadership team is one that can move the school system forward, but there is much work to be done.

In our view, there are two fundamental aspects to bringing about meaningful school reform in D.C. – vision and financial resources. We have confidence in Chancellor Rhee's leadership and her focus on teaching in the classroom and on removing obstacles to excellence. We believe she has the right kind of experience and background to do an excellent job recruiting talent, raising the quality of education, and holding employees accountable. What will be trickier is ensuring that she is able to corral the resources within DCPS to carry out her vision. Right now, we are working closely with the Chancellor to help her build capacity within her office to address the budgetary and business process issues that have plagued the system for decades. Chancellor Rhee is at her best when her time is freed up to focus on the classroom, and that's where her energies need to be spent, not on the workings and hurdles of the bureaucracy.

The DCPS budget must also be aligned with her vision as soon as possible. Given the lengthy D.C. budget cycle, the Chancellor has barely cleared six months on the job and, in the midst of all that must be done in the school system, she is tasked with unraveling the DCPS budget in order to have a proposal ready five months in advance of the next school year. It is one thing to have to tweak a budget from one year to the next. However, much more must be done than simply tweaking the budget; there is a real need to start from scratch, looking at resources from the classroom on up. This is not a simple task and certainly not one that gets done in a couple of months or without major rethinking of the budget structure. Consider that the school system is also losing students and their per pupil funding allotments at the same time. This is an area where there

certainly is a role for the Chief Financial Officer as well as other independent experts who are able to help with this major challenge. Every year where a budget is passed that is not aligned with the Chancellor's vision for the school system is another missed opportunity.

Along with fixing the budget, this is also the right time to be evaluating the business systems of DCPS – its procurement, personnel, and technology systems. We know that DCPS has not maintained best-in-class systems that should be helping to ease and improve its day-to-day operations. Throwing more money after these systems will be more expensive and less effective in the long run. If there is a need to spend more to make sure that these systems work, are not obsolete, and can be utilized effectively, we believe this is a necessary investment that will yield dividends down the road. Again, the Federal City Council stands ready to help.

There are many actions that we have applauded over the past year. As I mentioned before, the Mayor's decision to assume responsibility for school reform was bold and necessary to have any impact on the D.C. school bureaucracy. Since then, Chancellor Rhee's decision to downsize the central office, intervene in the hiring of principals for the school year, close or restructure underutilized school facilities, and begin negotiations immediately with the teachers' union are all critical first steps. With these actions, she is able to free up resources that can be better spent on academics, and she has raised expectations and hopes for the school system that everyone can share. However, we believe that, underneath it all, it will be essential that the budget and business systems of DCPS work effectively so that these efforts are sustainable over time. This may take time and money, but it is crucial that these improvements happen soon.

In my view, there has been an understandable focus on the DCPS budget and the high level of per pupil spending that we see, compared to other major cities. It is important, at this early stage of reform, to understand that there may be a need for additional costs to fix the things in DCPS that must be fixed in order to

get long-term spending down to a more palatable level. In the private sector, this is a clearly understood maxim. In order to have a more efficient business, you may need to spend money up front on a new billing system or on a new personnel platform. In order to streamline your workforce, you may need to offer financial incentives to spur early retirement or to separate employees who are not performing. The resources that you save can ultimately be reinvested in the right areas, in the classroom and on the things that will help students fulfill their potential.

We look forward to what lies ahead in terms of teacher improvement and leadership development within the D.C. Public Schools. Again, Chancellor Rhee's experience in this field should be an asset in this area. However, success will depend on being able to provide skills and leadership training over the long term, so we welcome any opportunity to participate in this important aspect of reform. We need to reward excellent performers and replicate their successes in the classroom. Those who do not perform and who do not provide the level of quality that is demanded by our parents and students should not be allowed to spend one extra day in our public school classrooms. This approach is used in the private sector to raise the quality and outcomes related to the services we provide, and this should be a model for how we improve our teaching quality and the services we provide children. Unfortunately, we know that proponents of the status quo are organizing and readying themselves to challenge every step in this regard, and it is precisely at this moment when courage, determination, and perseverance are needed. Again, the window of opportunity is open, and it is time for the city to make the most of it.

One last comment is in order. For school reform to work, we strongly believe that there must be a strong partnership between the government and the community. This can take place in many forms. In the days of COPE, one recommendation was to establish an independent broad-based organization that would help raise funds for school initiatives, provide outreach on behalf of schools, establish key partnerships, and otherwise provide an avenue to organize community support into real action. At the right point, we believe that reform in the D.C. Public

Schools will reach a point where the school system can become dependable partners, and perhaps then, a broad-based organized entity in support of school reform can be achieved. We look forward to that time and will continue to work with the Chancellor and the Mayor on helping make school reform a reality this time around.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions you might have for me at this time.

On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Public Schools?

The Committee on Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia (OGM)

Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman (D-HI)
George V. Voinovich, Ranking Member (R-OH)

Statement submitted by

ROBERT VINSON BRANNUM
Chairman, Education Committee
DC Federation of Civic Associations, Inc

158 Adams Street, NW
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14 March 2008

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Senator Voinovich, members of the Subcommittee, I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record and the work of the Subcommittee.

I am Robert Vinson Brannum, Chairman of the Education Committee of the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, Inc. I am also a retired military veteran of the United States Air Force and a licensed District of Columbia Public Schools substitute teacher.

Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, one year ago when Mayor Adrian Fenty proposed his education takeover initiative, the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, Inc., and the D.C. Federation of Citizens Association opposed this legislation as undemocratic in the absence of an approved voter referendum by the residents of the District of Columbia. Parents, community education reform advocates, various District ward education councils, and District Ward Democratic Party organizations opposed Mayor Fenty's education takeover initiative because it denied voters of the District of Columbia the right to vote in a referendum.

The Congressional Research Service in its report, "District of Columbia School Reform Proposals: Congress's Possible Role in the Charter Amendment Process" indicated citizens of the District of Columbia must vote in a referendum on any locally initiated charter amending proposals. This did not happen.

Since the implementation of this new governance structure, significant public involvement to improve District public education has been stymied. Any efforts to engage parents, teachers, and the community at large have been perfunctory and an illusion of inclusion. Most recently, a group of parents, teachers, and residents had to go into a District Superior Court to receive an imaginary budget document from the DCPS Chancellor and the Mayor. This is a major contrast to business and special interest groups, which are able to have head of the line access to the Chancellor and the Mayor for documents and budget information.

Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and members of the Subcommittee, the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, Inc., seeks and supports high quality public education for District children. So too, do parents, teachers, and community education reform advocates across the District of Columbia. Since the implementation of the new law, the process

undertaken has been unnecessarily divisive, vindictive, and secretive. People and organizations which have been fighting for true educative reform and community involvement for years have been locked out, while persons unfamiliar with District public education and institutions which seek to undermine restoration and revitalization of DCPS as a premier provider of public education have been given open access. This process has been abusive to parents, teachers, employees, the community, and to students.

The real intent of the new law is to improve District public education for children. I respectfully submit it is too early to assess what impact the law has made to improving test scores, lowering the achievement between African American students, or improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, any improvement, which may occur, would rightly be attributed to the academic standards and curriculum developments put in place by former DCPS Superintendent Clifford Janey.

Finally, the public of the District of Columbia has a right to know and to be involved in the decision-making process to improve public education for its children. Parents, teachers, and District community education advocates should have to bang on doors or peek through cracks in windows to learn what is happening with District public education. Public education, paid for by public dollars is the public's business.

Testimony of

Paul Strauss

United States Senator
District of Columbia (Shadow)

before the

United States Senate

Committee in Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

Regarding

"On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Public Schools?"

10.00 AM - March 14th 2008
Room 342
Dirksen Senate Office Buildin

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and members of the Sub-Committee, on behalf of the citizens of the District of Columbia, I thank you for allowing me to present this statement for the record in my capacity not only as the elected United States Senator for the District of Columbia, but also as the parent of two children in District of Columbia Public Schools.

We have an obligation to make sure our children get the tools necessary to succeed as adults, because they deserve to be taught in the best environment possible and the same goes for our teachers who deserve an optimal environment for teaching. We have to continue to re-energize our communities and protect our citizens, one way of doing this is by ensuring our children a safe place to learn and study. Whether it's public safety or economic development, all key issues can be linked back directly to education. When we achieve great schools, we reduce crime, build a stellar workforce, energize our economy and give opportunities to those that need them and haven't gotten the opportunity before. We hereby create a place we can be proud to call home.

I have a personal interest in the well-being of our Public Schools in the District of Columbia, one being that my own children go to Public Schools and they deserve the best education that the District of Columbia has to offer, but I not only wish this for my own children, but for all the citizens of DC.

Our public education system is still facing challenges, some resulting in serious problems. By way of example: more than two-thirds of our fourth graders are reading below grade level and less than 50% of the students graduate high school in 5 years. This is not the fault of the people at the schools. The hard working men and women who belong to the Washington Teachers Union, are not the problem, and should not be scapegoated as such. They should be made our partners; they deserve our respect for doing an important job.

Shortly after the Mayor of the District of Columbia, Adrian M. Fenty, took office in

January of 2007, he made a promise to change and improve the lives of all the residents of DC and especially its children. He made it one of his prominent issues, because DC residents were tired of schools that were failing our children.

On June 1st of 2007, Bill H.R. 2080 became law, which granted to our Mayor direct control over the DC Public Schools. This law originated in the Council of the District of Columbia. The requirement for Congressional approval was an unfortunate formality, resulting from the lack of DC's Self-Determination, something the majority and our two leading Presidential candidates have committed to working to change. While I understand the present Constitutional structure gives this committee the legal authority to hold oversight hearings over the performance of the local government, it would be a mistake to interpret the formality of the required Senate approval of a locally requested change as a federal mandate to interfere in the reform efforts of our locally elected and appointed leaders.

The perceptive comment of Chairman Akaka on the subject of transparency shows the current state of Dc's self-determination: " If there was more transparency on the matter of the District of Columbia's Public School, the oversight of the Senate would perhaps not be needed. This exact comment shows that there is more need for communication between all the parties affected by the decisions made concerning the Public Schools

It is the intent of my locally elected leaders to make meaningful changes to the failing math and science scores, unkempt buildings, poor management and excessively high administrative costs. As DC's US Senator, I appreciate the Sub-Committee's interest in the welfare of our students, but I hope these "oversight efforts" will respect the boundaries between Congressional support, and federal interference.

There is no denying the need for reform was great. So far there have been significant changes, but the results are not clearly apparent. The start of the fall semester 2007

should have made way for new beginnings, but instead saw one of the lowest amount of student registrations in a long time. My hope is that as more improvements are made and planned facilities improvement work is completed, more children will return to DC Public Schools and ensure the parents their children do get the attention they deserve.

The controversial issue to date is the proposed closing of more than a dozen Public Schools. While reasonable people may disagree on the appropriateness of this course of action, I want to make clear to this Sub-Committee, that this is a decision that must be made at the local and community level, and without Congressional interference.

I strongly believe that the District of Columbia is able to overcome the problems concerning the District of Columbia Public Schools by working cooperatively with the parties involved. The reality is that the challenges facing DC's public schools are not significantly greater than those in any other urban center. While they are a responsibility of the District and it's citizens, Congress can do a lot to improve education throughout the nation, as well as in the District. While we resent any interference, we would welcome your assistance.

Chairman Akaka, let me again thank you for the opportunity present this statement for the record. In closing, I would like to thank Jessica Evans and Anke Ruwette, two members of my staff for their assistance in helping prepare this statement.

SWORN STATEMENT BY MARY SPENCER
Provided to Senator Daniel Akaka
Friday, March 21, 2008

My name is Mary Spencer, I am committee chair for DC ACORN School Modernization Committee (ASMOC) and I have lived in the District of Columbia all my life. I, as well as my husband attended DC Public Schools and my 4 children were educated in the DCPS system. I am the grandmother of 2 grandchildren who now attend Stuart-Hobson Middle School and I have a great concern with the inability to have input or access to the school budget until this information has been finalized and received by the mayor. At this point, the matter is finished and any hearings will be for **show only** and will have no valid impact. If there is some objection to the elimination of specific line items in the budget that could be discussed, the parents' timely concerns have been eliminated.

We need to understand that our children, whose education is being destroyed now, need to be protected and safeguarded by their parents regarding what type of education they continue to receive. The mayor does not see it this way. He has decided to independently make decisions for our children, because his are not attending public schools, and not allow concerned parents to have input. He has determined that his independent conception of what my grandchildren need, is better than what parents can assist him with.

My concern is that democracy has been snatched away from DC residents and I want democracy given back to the parents, teachers and students of the District of Columbia. We had a democratic system that included the tax paying citizens views on what should be included in the school budget and now our voices have been shut-out. Every opportunity that has been provided for a public hearing has been at a time that is most inconvenient to the public. For instance, the last round of hearings regarding school closures were during the Christmas Season. Now, we are being provided another opportunity to be heard regarding the usage of the schools that have been slated to close during Easter – Holy Week. This scheduling is outright obstruction of parents to be involved in any part of the school reconstructing and I want the mayor to know that we are not going to continue to take his disregard for parents most precious commodity, **our children!**

We need Congress to help the citizens of the District of Columbia insist on a democratic school system where community involvement is provided. Give the citizens back the right to vote on what is provided for our children. Put democracy back into the school system. We suffered through the hard times, now allow us to be part of the good times as we work with the school system, not the mayor's system, to put the word GREAT and keep the word PUBLIC in our Public School System! Tell Mayor Fenty to stop selling our children's education and school buildings for profit!

DCPS Oversight Hearing Testimony November 2007

Good Morning Councilmembers-
My name is Gina Arlotto and I am the co-founder of Save Our Schools as well as a DCPS parent. Since the Mayor took over the schools and installed his choice as Chancellor, those of us with children in the schools have seen no real improvement of the system as a whole, other than timely responses to facility issues, which is under the authority of Mr. Lew. Ms. Rhee, while quick to answer emails, is less than forthcoming when it comes to true vision and leadership for this troubled system. Since it is so easy to blame the central office and teachers for all the ills in our schools, she finds it hard to stop the blame-fest and actually come up with a plan for transformation. Instead, Ms. Rhee is suggesting that many of the schools that are failing AYP be turned over to education management operators (EMOs), convert to charter status or have a local charter operator take over the failing school. Let me be very clear: there are no proven "turnaround specialists" here or nationally. Ms. Rhee is suggesting the outsourcing of our schools to people who have no proven track record of turning around a school. This responsibility lies with Ms. Rhee and her staff. Other school districts are studying the data-they know the name and problem of every child who is failing to meet the mark. They have come up with targeted plans to intervene and raise achievement. In DCPS these students are just a point on a graph; our Chancellor, Deputy Mayor and State Education Officer know nothing about what these children need to achieve at higher levels. I know very well that the problems facing urban education are hard. However, I refuse to believe that we, as a city and a community, cannot come up with our own major transformation plans that will turn our schools around. We are the ones who should know our schools and children the best-not outside contractors.

I know that some of you may think that I must have missed coming down here to testify, because I used to be here so often, but the reality is just the opposite. While not a supporter of the Mayor's takeover, nor his choice in Chancellor, I nevertheless foolishly allowed myself to hope that maybe his actions last summer would make things better. After all, I have a 6th grader, 3rd grader and a Kindergartner enrolled now in DCPS, and I desperately want it to get better for them and their classmates. Unfortunately that is not happening, and I don't know how much longer I can wait. Everyday I still see the same nonsense from DCPS-from school leaders with no vision, to a dearth of leadership, to ill-prepared and unqualified teachers who are not even given the opportunity to retrain and learn to be better, to the absence of real resources such as full-time math and reading tutors in every school.

I thought that a Mayoral takeover was supposed to make the turnaround of our school system happen. From what I can tell, all it has done is to diffuse the responsibility even worse than previously. And if Ms. Rhee succeeds in turning over a significant number of schools to charter operators and EMOs, I think the council should seriously look into just what they are paying a Chancellor to do. Is it her job only to pick the contractors? And if that is so, then couldn't the Deputy Mayor and his staff or the State Education Officer and her staff do the same thing? Ms. Rhee made a big deal about central office

employees who didn't know their own job description-so what is hers? Is it to only run the handful of schools that are performing? That isn't really all that much of a challenge-and it's certainly not worth the highest salary in the city. I thought Ms. Rhee was hired to BE the "turnaround specialist": too bad the only thing she's turning around is any hope that things could be different, could be BETTER, for DCPS.

Budget Testimony February 2008

Good morning –
My name is Gina Arlotto and I am a DCPS parent of three children as well as the co-founder of Save Our Schools. I have testified for the last several years on the inadequacy of the DCPS budget after receiving copies of the budget before this hearing. This year, when no budget was forthcoming, several people, including myself, filed a lawsuit on Feb. 14th in order to compel the Mayor and Chancellor to submit the DCPS budget for public review.

What we received on February 19th, does not even bear considered scrutiny. If it is to be believed, then those in charge of DCPS have reneged on every promise made to hopeful parents in order to get them to swallow bitter medicine. In this budget that I have before me, there are no additional funds for the comprehensive staffing model, no budgets for enhanced programming at the receiving schools, no allocation for successful programs like the Summer Bridge program. Instead, what we as parents of DCPS students have, are the scraps over which we are to fight.

This budget does provide for a drastic expansion of the contracting out of DCPS services from $170 million to $512 million, increased funds for central office business operations from $33 million to $37 million and special education tuition increases from $182 m to $236 m. I thought that with mayoral control we would be able to reduce our spec. ed expenditures by creating internal capacity for our special ed students! Our general payroll is decreased from $505 m to $168 m and instructional programs will be performed almost entirely by contractors! And so the privatization of our public school system will be nearly complete. Congratulations-you have finally sealed the deal.

As has been proven time and again, privatization of many government functions does not save money nor improve services. And yet, you persist in experimenting with our children's futures. I for one, with rising 7th, 4th and a 1st grader would like to believe that the so-called reform in DCPS is happening for the right reasons and will actually create a better learning environment, not just for my kids, but for all the children of DC.

Respectfully submitted,

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BACKGROUND
ON THE PATH TO GREAT EDUCATIONAL RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?
MARCH 14, 2008

This is the second in a series of hearings to examine D.C.'s progress in reforming the D.C. education system and review a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study that evaluated the first eight months of the reforms.

Last year, the Mayor asked for and received the authority to assume control of the education system and be held accountable for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Shortly after the initial hearing that established expectations and began the process of accountability, the Subcommittee requested that GAO conduct a short-term and long-term study of the Mayor's efforts. In the short-term study, GAO focused on the management reforms at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), and the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM). The short-term study concluded that the early management reform efforts have made significant progress, but there needs to be a system-wide strategic plan for the reforms. DC disagrees with this recommendation.

Progress of the Reforms

In 2006, DCPS contracted an independent organization, the Parthenon Group, to study the DCPS system and provide recommendations for improvement. In December 2006, the Parthenon Group released their study and recommended that DCPS redesign the teaching program, curriculum, student testing program, human capital system, central office, support functions, special education program management, facilities maintenance system, and community outreach program. These same recommendations can be found in five previous reform efforts.

On Thursday, July 19, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the District of Columbia held a hearing entitled *Great Expectations: Assessment, Assurances, and Accountability of the Mayor's Proposal to Reform the District of Columbia Public School System*. The witnesses at the hearing were the Honorable Adrian Fenty, Mayor of the District of Columbia; Ms. Michelle Rhee, Chancellor of Education for the District of Columbia; Mr. Robert C. Bobb, President of the State Board of Education; Mr. Victor Reinoso, Acting Deputy Mayor for Education for the District of Columbia; Ms. Deborah A. Gist, State Superintendent of Education; and Mr. Allen Y. Lew, Executive Director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization for D.C. Public Schools.

The hearing examined D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty's recently approved proposal to assume control of the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) and review his implementation plan, establish expectations, and ensure accountability in this effort. While they had not fully developed plans for reforming the schools, the Mayor's leadership team discussed ways in which they planned to bring about changes to the physical structures within the school system, the quality of the teachers, and the overall administration of the system.

In the past six months since the reforms, GAO looked at four main areas of reforms: the separation of the State office functions and the local education office, the reforms at DCPS, the reforms to the facilities and the office of facility maintenance, and the establishment of accountability throughout the system. The report shows significant progress made by the reforms. According to GAO:

- The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) successfully transitioned the State Education Office from the Local Education Office and implemented a performance management system. It is working to develop teacher licensing, address No Child Left Behind Act compliance, reform the special education system, and address early childhood literacy programs.
- Chancellor Michelle Rhee has released proposals to consolidate unused space in schools, expand effective programs, invest in teacher training, hire 50 new principals, and establish new academic priorities.
- The Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM) has worked to reduce the number of work orders outstanding and improve the system for principals to request work.

GAO's central recommendation for the education system is to develop a long-term system-wide strategic plan. While OSSE, DCPS, and OPEFM are developing strategic plans, there is no system-wide strategic plan in place that coalesces these plans into one strategic vision for the reforms. The Mayor's Office responded to this criticism saying they have a strategic plan and vision for the reforms, but it is not written down. According to GAO, it is critically important in a system that requires a lot of transformation and improvement that a transparent, living strategic plan be developed and used to guide those efforts.

Proposal to Close 23 Schools

There have been two controversial decisions made by Chancellor Rhee and Deputy Mayor Reinoso in the last few months that have received a high level of attention. The first was a proposal to consolidate and close more than 23 schools as part of the Renew, Revitalize, and Reorganize plan. At a January 14, 2008, hearing of the DC City Council, Rhee presented the plan and explained that she listened to students, teachers, parents, principals, and key stakeholders through living room meetings, town halls, and individual conversations. In addition to the school closures, the plan seeks to deliver new, innovative programs to stimulate and boost academic achievement across the school system. Rhee noted that the system would save $23 million through the consolidation and that the school system was supporting 330sq ft per student, which is significantly higher than the national average of 150 sq ft per student.

A group called Coalition to Save Our Neighborhood Schools organized in opposition to the proposal and enlisted the support of Council member Marion Barry (Ward 8). They argued that the proposal planned to consolidate too many schools in Ward 8. However, after 23 public hearings with an estimate 400 attendees on the proposal, the Deputy Mayor and Chancellor Rhee decided to move forward with a final proposal to close an initial 18 schools and potentially close four more. Council member Barry later changed his position on the school closings.

Termination of 98 Employees

The second controversial issue relates to Chancellor Rhee's new authority to terminate DCPS central office employees. By December 14, 2007, all employees working in the DCPS central office were required to have a performance evaluation. For most of the employees, it was the first time in the work history that their performance had been evaluated. The performance evaluations were rated on a scale of 1- 4 and based on core competencies, but not specifically related to the job description of each employee. Employees were rated: 1 - does not meet expectations; 2- needs improvement; 3 - meets expectations; and 4 - exceeds expectations.

Under new law approved by the Council, Rhee has been authorized to terminate certain employees without notice or performance evaluation in the first year of enactment. Future terminations would require a 15-day separation notice and performance evaluations within six months of separation. On Friday, March 7, 2008, Rhee terminated 98 employees and another 18 employees either quit or chose not to renegotiate their positions for a total loss of 116 employees. Of the 98 employees terminated, 40 employees were in the Office of Information Tehchnology, 26 were in the Extended Day Office, and 32 were in Other Offices. Their annual salaries totaled $6,121,054.

The terminations are still being reviewed by the DC City Council, and agreements have been reached between DCPS and other DC government agencies to address any shortfalls in the operations of DCPS from the terminations.

The Mayor's Reform Proposal

Shortly after taking office, Mayor Adrian Fenty proposed to take over the failing school system from the D.C. Board of Education. The D.C. City Council passed DC Bill 17-0001, which transfered the management and oversight authority of the DCPS from the Board of Education (Board) to the Mayor by establishing DCPS as a cabinet-level agency subordinate to the Mayor.

Under this bill, the DCPS will be administered by a Chancellor who will be the Chief Executive Officer of DCPS and directly accountable to the Mayor. This legislation also establishes a Department of Education to be headed by a Deputy Mayor for Education, who is appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. The Department of Education will have oversight of the State Education Office (SEO), the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and the Office of Ombudsman for Public Education.

On May 1, 2007, Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) introduced H.R. 2080, a bill to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to conform the District charter to revisions made by the Council of the District of Columbia relating to public education, and the House passed the bill on May 8, 2007. The Senate approved the bill by Rule XIV on May 22, 2007, and it became Public Law No. 110-33 on June 1, 2007.

The Mayor announced shortly after receiving approval of his authority the nomination of Michelle Rhee, Executive Director of the New Teachers Project, to the position of Chancellor of DCPS; Alan Lew, the Chief Executive Officer of the D.C. Sports and Entertainment

Commission, to head the Office of Facilities Modernization; and Victor Reinoso, representative on the D.C. Board of Education, to serve as Deputy Mayor for Education. Ms. Rhee and Mr. Lew were confirmed by the D.C. City Council on Tuesday July 10, 2007. Mr. Reinoso was confirmed by the Council on October 2, 2008.

DCPS Reform Priorities of Mayor Fenty's Administration

A February 23, 2007, report titled, "*DCPS Reform Priorities of Mayor's Administration*," highlights the accountability measures and goals for reform of DC Public Schools.

GOALS

Goal I:	Ensure Challenging Curriculum and Instruction for All Students
Goal II:	Teachers and Principals Will Deliver High Quality Instruction to Every Student
Goal III:	Safe and Orderly Schools
Goal IV:	Develop a Strong System of Accountability Balanced with School Level Autonomy
Goal V:	Ensure Exceptional Service
Goal VI:	Build on Our Community's Assets

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES

- Percentage of students performing at or above proficiency in reading in grades three through eight (35 percent must be at or above proficiency in reading).
- Percentage of students performing at or above proficiency in mathematics in grades three through eight (26 percent must be at or above proficiency in mathematics).
- Percentage of students performing at or above proficiency on writing assessment in grades four and eight. (11 percent of DCPS 4th graders must be at or above proficiency in writing. 10 percent of DCPS 8th graders must be at or above proficiency in writing).
- Narrowing of disparity based on race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status on all academic measures.
- Percentage of students graduating within 5 years (43 percent of entering 9th graders must graduate within 5 years).
- Percentage of Advanced Placement exams receiving a score of 3 or higher (28 percent must score at or above a 3).
- Increase in average score on the SAT, accompanied by increase in percentage of students who take the test will also increase.
- Percentage of students will meet or exceed the national average on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading, mathematics and science.
- Student performance data will be communicated to parents and students on a regular basis and in a consistent manner.

INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

- Percentage of effective teaching staff. Effectiveness will be measured by fair and rigorous evaluations, including objective student outcome measures and research-based

assessment of instructional practice. Target will be set after a district-wide teacher accountability system has been proposed, evaluated, and adopted.

- Percentage of teaching positions filled on first day of school, and at intervals throughout the year.
- Percentage of key instructional support positions filled at predetermined points during the year. This includes, but is not limited to, math and literacy coaches, and new teacher mentors.

CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Percentage of "certified" classrooms. Standards will be defined for the "certification" of classroom readiness (necessary instructional materials and supplies). Data to be reported in such a way as to reveal any systematic differences between groups of schools (grade level, poverty level, performance level, etc.)
- Percentage of schools meeting DCPS standards for technology (Baseline standards to be determined.).
- Percentage of schools meeting standards for co-curricular activities. Minimum standards will be developed for co-curricular activities at all levels. (Co-curricular activities are extensions of the core curriculum and provide an opportunity for students to use critical thinking skills learned in the classroom outside of the traditional classroom setting. Examples include chess, Math Olympiad, National Academic League, Debate, Science Olympiad, Odyssey of the Mind, and Model UN.) Once minimum standards are set, the baseline percentage of all schools meeting the DCPS standard of co-curricular activities will be set and tracked moving forward.
- Percentage of schools receiving the top rating(s) on the DCPS SchoolStat Accountability System.

SAFE AND ORDERLY SCHOOLS

- Percentage of students indicating they feel safe at school. (Survey and baseline data to be completed by end of first year of mayoral control.)
- Percentage of parents indicating they believe schools are safe. (Survey and baseline data to be completed by end of first year of mayoral control.)
- Percentage of schools scoring at or above 90 percent on an annual safe school audit. (Audit and baseline data to be completed by end of first year of mayoral control.)
- Change in the number of state-reportable incidents of inappropriate behavior per 1,000 students.

WORLD CLASS SERVICE

- Percentage of employees, parents and community members who agree DCPS provides timely, accurate, and responsive service on annual satisfaction surveys and polls.

STRONG PARENT AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Percentage of DCPS parents agreeing that DCPS is doing a good job and is headed in the right direction.
- Percentage of community members agreeing that DCPS is doing a good job and is headed in the right direction.

Background on DCPS Reforms

From its inception, the DCPS System has experienced several different governance models. Until 1969, the school system was governed by a mayoral appointed school board. The first superintendent was appointed in 1862 by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. From 1969 until June 12, 2007, the school board ran the public school system. Beginning in the 1970s, DCPS began experiencing a decline in the achievement rates of its students.

In the past twenty years there have been five major reform efforts to address the failing public school system:

- D.C. Committee on Public Education (COPE), *Our Children, Our Future* (1989);
- COPE, *Our Children Are Still Waiting* (1995);
- DCPS Business Plan for Strategic Reform (2001);
- Council of Great City Schools, *Restoring Excellence to DCPS* (2005); and
- DCPS Master Education Plan and Master Facilities Plan (2006).

The DCPS contracted an independent organization, the Parthenon Group, last year to study the DCPS system and provide recommendations for improvement. In December 2006, the Parthenon Group released their study and recommended that DCPS redesign the teaching program, curriculum, student testing program, human capital system, central office, support functions, special education program management, facilities maintenance system, and community outreach program. These same recommendations can be found in five previous reform efforts.

The Pantheon study was the statistical basis for the Mayor's proposal, DC Bill 17-0001. The central recommendation for these specific reforms was to shift control of the system to the Mayor and reduce the complex governance structures to improve accountability and accelerate change in a dysfunctional system. The study suggests four reasons for shifting to mayoral governance:

1. DCPS is in a state of emergency requiring an immediate turnaround strategy;
2. The existence of slow progress in spite of consistent visions for reform of the system's 20 years of underperformance;
3. A complex public education system that lacks accountability and has hindered reform efforts; and
4. The need for a change to accelerate the system's ability to urgently improve student achievement.

Legislation

- Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (District of Columbia Public Schools Agency Establishment Act of 2007) http://www.dccouncil.washington.dc.us/images/00001/20070423153411.pdf

- H.R. 2080 [Public Law No: 110-33], introduced by Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to conform the District charter to revisions made by the Council of the District of Columbia relating to public education.

Additional Resources

- District of Columbia City Council hearings on the District of Columbia Public Schools: November 2, 2007, November 29, 2007, January 14, 2008, and February 22, 2008. http://www.dccouncil.washington.dc.us/.

- *Fiscal Year 2009 Budget for the Public Schools in the District of Columbia,* Deputy Mayor for Education Victor Reinoso, Tuesday February 19, 2008, http://newsroom.dc.gov/show.aspx/agency/dme/section/35/release/12703.

- *District of Columbia Public School Consolidation Plan*, Mayor Adrian Fenty, Deputy Mayor for Education Victor Reinoso, and DCPS Chancellor Michelle Rhee, February 1, 2008, http://newsroom.dc.gov/show.aspx/agency/dme/section/2/release/12592.

- The Washington Post, *Fixing D.C.'s Schools, a Washington Post Investigation*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/metro/interactives/dcschools/.

- Council of the Great City Schools, *Analysis of Mayor Adrian Fenty's Plan for the District of Columbia Public Schools,* February 2007 http://www.dcpswatch.com/mayor/0702.htm or http://www.cgcs.org/.

- DCPS Reform Priorities of the Fenty Administration, February 23, 2007, http://edreform.dc.gov/.

- Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole Report on Bill 17-0001, the "Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007," April 3, 2007, http://dc.gov/mayor/pdf/DC_Public_Education_Reform_Act_final.shtm

Post-Hearing Responses to Questions for the Record
Submitted by Michelle Rhee, Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools
District of Columbia

"On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Public Schools?"

1. **To what extent are you coordinating with the DC Public Charter School Board or otherwise considering the available charter school programs when proposing new programs in DC Public Schools?**

Initially, our focus has been on addressing DCPS's problems, so that our system better serves schools, students and families alike. To that end, we created the Renew, Revitalize, Reorganize plan (available at: http://www.k12.dc.us/rrr/rrr.htm). We believe that this plan will provide our students with the necessary academic and social supports and the robust school experiences they deserve, including services like social workers, psychologists, reading and literacy coaches, music and P.E. teachers and a host of other administrative and staff supports.

Charter schools in D.C. already vary widely in their academic offerings and programs. They also enjoy a great degree of independence and autonomy. As such, coordination between DCPS and charters around specific programmatic initiatives is somewhat difficult, unless it is conducted on a school-by-school basis. However, we absolutely support successful charters operating in D.C., because, as noted above, our students deserve a robust set of quality educational choices We also have a long-term goal of working with charter schools in the District to create more consistency with DCPS around accountability measures, so that parents can assess all of their public school options more effectively.

2. **What are you doing to address the older students who have already suffered through a neglected education system, but still need preparation for graduation and post-graduation opportunities?**

We have begun our work at DCPS by making a series of significant, baseline changes because: (a) they are critical to creating the foundation we need for dramatic strides in student achievement, and (b) we know that no further improvements in student achievement could be made and sustained without first cleaning up and instituting these basic systems and reforms. Every initiative implemented under my leadership has been connected to student achievement; enhancing student achievement has been at the core of all of our work since Day One.

While you are correct to note that many of our reforms will yield results further down the road, we have been far from complacent in addressing students who currently are at the high school level. To that end we have undertaken a number of important initiatives. First, we are reforming the way master-scheduling for high school students works in the District's public schools. Throughout this past fall and winter our three primary Academic Offices (the Office of Teaching and Learning, the Office of Data and Accountability, and the Office of the Superintendent) undertook a massive audit of transcripts of 12th grade students. The purposes of this audit were:

- To ensure that all student's transcripts accurately reflected their high school careers;
- To revise student schedules to increase the number of students able to graduate and be promoted in 2008;
- To identify students who were in danger of missing graduation and provide credit recovery options that will help them graduate; and
- To reform central office policies and procedures to improve the process to greatly reduce future scheduling issues that could affect graduation and streamline processes for schools.

During the audit, we found that a disheartening number of students had been programmed into classes they had already taken. The causes of this were myriad – including paper records that often did not follow students when they transferred between high schools, high student transfer rates both within DCPS and externally, the fact that summer school courses were not included in master student information system, lack of clarity about course sequences, and a lack of training of school staff.

Because we have now been able to identify the underlying causes of the high frequency of high-school scheduling problems, we are making system-wide changes to keep more students on track to graduate in the future. Specifically, schools are now required to use only electronic records, data system and management issues at individual schools are being addressed, individualized course plans are being created for each student that will follow that student even if he or she transfers to a new school, and data systems for summer school and the regular school year are being normalized. In addition, memos on proper course sequencing have been provided to school staff and the Office of Teaching and Learning is developing a comprehensive academic guidebook for school administrators, we are creating school-based scheduling teams that are properly trained, and we are providing student-by-student schedule analysis in the central office and creating new reports of this analysis that can be easily accessed by the schools.

Finally, we are providing new resources to students who have either failed or failed to take classes that are required for graduation. Specifically, we are reaching out to them proactively and helping them to enroll in credit recovery programs at night, online or over the summer, so that they can still graduate on time. Without these efforts a significant number of those students would have failed to graduate this year for the simple, but inexcusable, reason that adults were failing to do their jobs.

While these efforts are directed mostly towards students in the upper grades, we also are putting increased focus on the academic progress of high school freshman and sophomores. Counselors are now meeting regularly with all of their students to ensure that schedule adjustments are being made as necessary and continue to reflect the needed credits. Principals are being required to monitor counseling staff to ensure that these meetings occur. Thus, in the future, students who fail or miss a required course will be identified much earlier, so that they can plan on participating in summer school early and stay on track towards timely graduation.

Last, we are developing a portfolio of new stand-alone schools and programs to support the most disengaged students in attaining a high school diploma. While this effort is still in the early stages, we would be happy to provide the Subcommittee more information about it at a later date.

3. Can you provide an explanation of how you have engaged key stakeholders in the process of the reforms and what additional plans you have to improve transparency for stakeholders?

Community engagement is important in any school district, but we know that is absolutely essential in a district that is making so many changes at such a rapid clip. We are working to implement a robust communications/community engagement strategy on several fronts. First, in the communities of closing schools, receiving schools, and restructuring schools, DCPS staff has met several times with the principals and representative faculty, staffs, local-school restructuring team ("LSRT") members, and other parents and/or community members affected by the changes. With these meetings, which will continue through the summer, we have begun the process of putting together the transition teams and transition goals for the newly consolidated schools. In addition, parents from some of the consolidating schools have been invited to participate in special trainings designed to help bring together parents from each of the merging schools and prepare them to take on parent leadership roles in a new combined-school community.

We also are working to ensure that the community at large has many opportunities to engage around the restructuring of the 27 schools, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, this summer. Specifically, my restructuring team and I have met with teams of faculty and parents from each of those schools to learn what they feel is working or not working in their buildings. In addition, we held four community forums on the general topic of restructuring during the month of April: three meetings for parents and others held at the central office, Bell Multicultural High School, and Anacostia High School, and a meeting for students from restructuring schools at Ballou High School. All of these meeting were well-attended. Participants shared with me their questions and concerns around restructuring and other topics. Finally, we recently posted detailed materials on the restructuring plans that have been developed for each of these schools on the DCPS website. (See http://www.k12.dc.us/offices/oda/plans_restructuring.htm.)

DCPS also is conducting parent focus groups on the more general issue of system-wide reform. These meetings are designed to engage parents around identifying ways that we can work together to improve parental involvement/engagement in all of our schools and to enhance the ability of parents to partner with their children and schools for academic success. To this end, DCPS is surveying school-based "parent coordinators" (typically parent volunteers or parent partners who receive a stipend for their work) to get their input on parental involvement in their schools and to solicit their ideas on how to improve it. Finally, we are identifying supports, professional development, and training opportunities that those parent coordinators may need to be more effective in the coming school year.

In July, I will launch the Chancellor's community forum series. These monthly meetings will address a specific issue in education, covering subjects like testing, special education and school leadership. Members of the community will be able to suggest topics through our website, and then meet to discuss the issues and deliver comments on them in a public forum. Finally, I would note that I receive, on average, 300 e-mails per week, and I respond, personally, to every email I receive from a member of the public. I find this practice absolutely essential to staying engaged with those who wish to provide input to DCPS.

4. a. How do you plan to engage teachers, unions, principals and administrators in the development of the new pay and performance management systems?

In creating our new compensation plan, the Washington Teachers' Union has been an absolute partner with us every step of the way. We are both very excited about the progress that we have made in negotiations, and with where we are heading. As the negotiations are not yet finished, we have not yet begun to engage teachers around the new pay plan. Once negotiations are finished, however, we plan to have a series of listening sessions with teachers and the union officials. As the WTU acts as the representative of our teachers, we are not permitted to engage teachers directly without the WTU being involved. As such, we will engage teachers in collaboration with the WTU when negotiations are finished. This summer we will begin an analogous negotiating process with the principals' union that we hope will be similarly fruitful. As of this point, principals and administrators' compensation scales have remained unchanged.

b. In the development and implementation of a new pay system, how will you ensure that the system is fair, accurate, and protects employees' rights?

While the negotiations are still ongoing, I am permitted to say that we fully plan to give teachers options. Not all teachers will be compelled to be part of the new system when it begins. We also are concerned about capturing the best data on our children and how they are learning, so that a pay system that links teacher performance to student achievement is based on accurate and valid information about academic progress our students are making. To that end we have engaged Tom Kane, of Harvard's School of Education, to design a value-added assessment of our children, which will use a variety of means to measure their progress, including, but not limited to, standardized tests. We believe that through offering our experienced educators flexibility, while also tracking student growth in a comprehensive manner, we are protecting our employees' rights in a fair and accurate way, while providing tremendous incentives to our educators who get the best out of the children in the classroom.

Post-Hearing Responses to Questions for the Record
Submitted by Victor Reinoso
Deputy Mayor for Education
District of Columbia

"On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Public Schools?"

1. **According to a recent audit by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, D.C. Public School (DCPS) enrollment fell below 50,000 students, while public charter school enrollment increased to 22,000 students. Declining enrollment was one of the criteria used to justify the "Renew, Revitalize, and Reorganize DCPS" plan that includes closing 23 schools while expanding educational programs. A 2004 amendment to the DC School Reform Act of 1995 (DC Code §38-1802.09) gave public charter schools the "right of first offer" of public school buildings. However, the Committee has been informed that charter schools are not securing access to underused public school buildings and often use public money to lease and purchase space from the commercial market.**

   (a) Please explain your interpretation of §38-1802.09 and how you believe it applies to all DCPS facilities.
   (b) Of the buildings being closed or underused, which ones will be offered to public charter schools for right of first offer?
   (c) Of those buildings that will not be offered to public charter schools, what plans do you have for those buildings?"

The Attorney General of the District of Columbia has examined this issue and determined that the "right of first offer" provision governing the disposition of public school properties contained in D.C. Official Code § 38-1802.09 (b) (2007 Supp.) is triggered *only when a decision is made by the Mayor to dispose of the property to a non-District government party, including a public charter school.*[1] Accordingly, the Mayor has the authority to determine the city's highest-priority use for a public school building, to include non-education-related governmental uses for such properties by other District government agencies. Only after the Mayor has determined that the building is not needed for District government use is the "right of first offer" set forth in the statute triggered. Further, even where the "right of first offer" is triggered and one or more offers are received from a public charter school, the Mayor is authorized under the statute to act in the best interests of the District in determining the reasonableness of the offers and determining which, if any, to accept.

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[1] A public charter school is a non-District government party for this purpose, given the definition of a public charter school in District law. D.C. Official Code § 38-1800.02 (10) (B) (2007 Supp.) states, "[t]he term 'District of Columbia Government' neither includes the Authority nor a public charter school". Further, D.C. Official Code § 38-1800.02 (12) (B) (2007 Supp.) provides, "[t]he term 'District of Columbia public school' does not include a public charter school".

Because the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (effective June 12, 2007, D.C. Law 17-9, D.C. Official Code § 38-171 *et seq.*) (2007 Supp.) transferred the full array of governmental functions relating to DCPS formerly vested in the Board of Education of the District of Columbia (now the State Board of Education) to the Mayor, there is no longer a material distinction between "former" and "current" school properties as defined in § 38-1802.09. Accordingly, the analysis above is applicable to both "former" school properties (those closed before a date specified in the statute by the Board of Education and then expressly transferred to the Mayor) and "current" school properties (those that are contained within the DCPS building inventory, regardless of their specific use at the current time).

Thus, determinations of the future use of all "closed," "restructured" or "underused" school buildings, as referenced in parts b) and c) of this question, will be made by the Mayor by applying the legal standard described above to each building individually. This assessment process is currently underway. Because the process is not complete and the determination of the optimal use of each building will, necessarily, impact the need for others to be reserved for governmental purposes, a list of buildings that will be offered to charter schools is not available at this time. However, the District government is committed to working with the charter school community to address their space needs and ensure that every child has access to a quality learning environment. In fact, the District recently released the Douglass Junior High building to a charter school, and expects to make a number of other closed or closing buildings available to charters at the end of the current school year.

2. **To what extent has the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC) engaged the community and ensured that government services are reaching all students and families, including those in DCPS, public charter schools, and private/parochial schools?**

ICSIC is an umbrella group made up of the Directors of child-serving District Agencies (*i.e.,* DCPS, the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS)), as well as other Directors who may be able to bring particular resources to bear to support the work of those agencies (*i.e.,* the Chief Technology Officer, the Metropolitan Police Chief) that coordinates the Government's work in areas ranging from school violence to youth development. Both the Chairman of the D.C. Council and the Chair of the Council's Committee on Human Services are members of the Commission

All ICSIC meetings are recorded and made accessible to the public on the District Government's website. In addition, in preparation for and/or follow-up to ICSIC sessions on certain topics, my office reaches out to various stakeholders, including students, parents, community activists, school leaders, etc. for input. Finally, as specific projects come out of particular ICSIC sessions, work groups are set up to work on those projects. In addition to government officials, these task forces often include outside experts, advocates, and community members.

With regard to whether the needs of children in public charter and private schools are addressed by ICSIC, it should be noted that the head of the Public Charter Board serves on the Commission, as does the State Superintendent for Education, who has oversight over all public and private schools in the District of Columbia, as well of families engaged in home schooling. In addition, agencies such as DYRS and CFSA serve children from around the District, regardless of whether they attend DCPS, public charter, or private schools, so their contributions to the Commission's discussions on issues within the scope of their agency mandate inherently incorporate the needs of children enrolled in all of those types of educational programs.

3. **According to testimony submitted for the record by a community education activist, "Since the implementation of this new governance structure, significant public involvement to improve District public education has been stymied. Any efforts to engage parents, teachers and the community at large have been perfunctory and an illusion of inclusion." Can you provide an explanation of how you have engaged key stakeholders in the process of the reforms and what additional plans you have to improve transparency for stakeholders?**

Since the passage of the Public Education Reform Act last Spring, my office has organized Mayor's Town Hall Meetings on Education in each of the District's eight wards, and a separate Town Hall Meeting for students and other young people. In addition, we have made special efforts to give members of the public opportunities to comment on issues of particular concern. For example, we held 9 separate meetings, across the city, to get input on the Chancellor's initial school closing proposal. After the plan was revised, in response to public comments, we then held 23 more hearings on the final closure list (one at each affected school). My office also has held 10 community meetings on the topic of how closed school buildings might be used.

In addition, both the Chancellor and the new Ombudsman for Public Education have participated in numerous "living room conversations" on topics related to the reform initiative. At these meetings, which have occurred in private homes across the District, individuals have had the opportunity to raise issues or concerns to these top policy makers in an informal setting. At the same time, I have visited every District public school (traditional and charter) over the past year, talking directly with hundreds of teachers, parents, and students about their hopes for reform.

Finally, my office, the Office of the Chancellor, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education all have increased their capacity to address constituent concerns through dedicated staffing for this purpose, while the newly-created Office of the Ombudsman provides a new, independent venue for parents to voice complaints or seek resolution of individual concerns.

Post-Hearing Responses to Questions for the Record
Submitted by Deborah Gist
Office of the State Superintendent of Education
District of Columbia

"On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Public Schools?"

1. **The Office of the State Superintendent of Education is working to secure a longitudinal data system that will track the progress of each student through the D.C. Public School system. I understand that there are a number of programs that can be used in this process and that you have been working with longitudinal data experts to advise on the development of such a system for the District of Columbia. Please provide an explanation of your plans, including a timeframe, to procure and implement such a program.**

The Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System, known as SLED, is a project of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), implemented in partnership with the Mayor's Office, the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), and key public education stakeholders. The SLED responds to one of the key strategic education priorities identified by Mayor Fenty when he took office in January 2007. Its purpose is to increase access to systematic data for planning and accountability for all of the District's education systems, from Head Start and pre-kindergarten through college and into adulthood.

Over the next five years, the SLED will become the main repository for current and historical data on the District's public education systems. It will integrate into a relational database disparate information from varied educational data systems that currently reside across the District's Pre-K through adult education system. The SLED will standardize student academic information that local education agencies (LEAs), including DCPS and charter schools that act as their own LEA, currently store, and it will track student information state-wide, over multiple years and across multiple education institutions.

The SLED is designed to manage student learning, track assessment results, and inform the development of instructional strategies to improve school and classroom performance. It will ultimately link education systems to other services, such as community and school health programs, providing a comprehensive picture of both the learners and the education, health, and welfare services they obtain within the District of Columbia. This information will assist in meeting educational needs through better planning, trend analyses, performance projections, implementation, program evaluation, and stakeholder empowerment.

In preparation for building this system, OSSE staff has been working with nearly 100 stakeholder organizations in the community for more than a year. Based on thorough research to identify the features of the most effective longitudinal data bases across the country, we developed and widely distributed a Request for Proposals to the most highly reputed

management information system developers. We have selected a vendor for this project, and the contract has been transmitted to the City Council for approval. We expect a vote on it in June.

With regard to funding, the OSSE was one of 27 state organizations that received grants from the Federal Institute of Educational Sciences to support the development of a longitudinal student data system. We also have received a significant financial commitment from the District Government, and expressions of support from foundations and non-profit organizations that are eager to provide technical assistance and help us build this new capacity for data analysis and use. We are now working with experts and a stakeholder steering committee to establish a governance structure for the system that ensures the data are accurate and address community-wide needs, and that individual confidentiality is protected.

This year, we prepared for the coming of the SLED by creating unique permanent student identifiers for all K-12th graders in DCPS and in all public charter schools. In September, we will be able to automatically identify and provide free meals to eligible students without asking parents to complete unnecessary paperwork. We will also be able to provide assessment data to teachers so they may group and re-group students according to academic needs, and link performance practice to results on achievement documented through the DC-CAS, the DC state assessment this spring.

Ultimately, our vision is to create a system that tracks students from early childhood through post-secondary school and provides information on the variety of publicly-funded education-related services children are receiving. Such a system would encompass both school-specific information and out-of-school activities and services. It would allow educators and the city's decision makers to catalogue the array of government-related inputs a child is receiving and better understand the impacts of these various interventions. It will help track student movement across educational institutions, and it will respond to an unmet need to collect and analyze data that determines program effectiveness. Currently there is no easy way in the District to analyze which teacher preparation programs yield the best student outcomes, which curricular reforms lead to increased achievement, or what combination of interventions particular groups of students are enrolled in. With the SLED, we will be able to fill these critical information gaps, in order to better allocate resources and better serve District learners.

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