

**D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS: TAKING STOCK OF  
EDUCATION REFORM**

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**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

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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JULY 23, 2009  
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## **D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS: TAKING STOCK OF EDUCATION REFORM**

**THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2009**

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 2:40 p.m., in room SD-342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Akaka, Landrieu, Burris, Voinovich, and Ensign.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA**

Senator AKAKA. This hearing will come to order. Good afternoon and welcome. Thank you for joining us today as this Subcommittee continues our examination of reforms in the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system.

As many of you know before being elected to Congress, I was in education, so I care deeply about providing high-quality education for all of our children. I also appreciate the challenges facing any educational system and the hard work it takes to initiate and monitor reforms.

I know you all have been working hard for the past 2 years to implement far-reaching reforms in the D.C. school system. There is much left to do, but I understand that change does not happen overnight. I want to commend you very much on your efforts and achievements so far. In the first year of reforms, elementary and secondary school students in DCPS saw between an 8- and 11-point increase in their math and reading scores on the District's annual Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) exam. Recently released CAS scores for the 2008-2009 school year show continued improvements in math and reading scores for elementary and secondary schools in the District.

I commend DCPS for working to bolster the quality of its workforce by investing in its teachers and principals. DCPS is offering coaching to new and struggling teachers and providing workshops and instruction for principals. Additionally, DCPS is instituting individual performance evaluations for DCPS employees at all levels.

While these improvements are encouraging, problems persist. Despite widespread school restructuring efforts, the 2008-2009

CAS scores show a 4-percent decrease in the number of schools achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act. D.C. also continues to find itself on the Department of Education's high-risk list because of poor Federal grant management.

Given the challenges and pressing need to reform the District's schools, Senator Voinovich and I asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a short-term and long-term review of D.C.'s education initiatives and to make recommendations for improvements.

Last year, this Subcommittee held a hearing to examine the results of GAO's short-term study. We learned about efforts to improve student achievement and DCPS's physical infrastructure, as well as a number of other initiatives that were just beginning to take root.

Today, we will hear the results of GAO's long-term study, which focused on the District's efforts to improve academic achievement, strengthen the quality of teachers and principals, develop long-term plans, and improve accountability and performance throughout DCPS.

GAO has two primary recommendations for D.C. to ensure the effectiveness of education reforms and build upon past efforts. The first is to increase institutional and community stakeholder involvement in education policy planning. I agree that systematic stakeholder involvement is important; it adds valuable input for shaping the reforms and encourages community-wide commitment to progress.

GAO's second recommendation is to link individual performance evaluations to DCPS's strategic goals and initiatives. This is recommended not only for teachers, but also for central office employees. Linking individual performance to DCPS's goals will strengthen accountability and align employee performance with the agency's mission.

We are 2 years into the reform, and there is no less urgency to improve DCPS. Great strides have been made, but we have a long way yet to go. The 2009–2010 school year will soon get underway, and expectations of parents, teachers, the community, and, most importantly, the children are high.

I hope today we can gain a better understanding of the progress made, the challenges ahead, and the steps D.C. is taking to overcome those challenges.

I now turn to my good friend Senator Voinovich, who has many years of experience working on education issues, not only during his time in the Senate but also as Mayor of Cleveland and Governor of Ohio.

Senator Voinovich, will you please go ahead with your statement?

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR VOINOVICH**

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you, Senator Akaka. I want to thank you for holding this hearing and having an opportunity to evaluate the District's education reform since 2007. I have a sincere interest in improving education in the District because of my belief that a

world-class education is the best way to help every citizen make the best use of his or her God-given talents.

Chancellor Rhee, let me congratulate you on the progress that you have made. Senator Akaka said that the District students continue to improve their reading and math skills based on standardized tests, and I know it is not easy. I have been working with the Cleveland public school system since my days in the State legislature, and I will mention that later, but it is tough.

I think most people are amazed that the District is one of our Nation's most expensive urban school systems, although I think we know the cost of living is a little higher here than it is in other places in the country. And I think most of Congress was a little bit disappointed from GAO's report that the District continues to be on the Department of Education's high-risk list for its management of Federal education grants. And I understand that there is \$148 million that was allocated in stimulus funds, and I would be interested in knowing what the District is going to do with that money and, if they are going to use it for capital improvements, how they intend to prioritize those and get it done.

I am interested in it because when I was governor, we undertook a program to rebuild all of our schools in the States and really put in place an entity that worked with the school districts to make sure that the thing was done properly. And so far, it is a program that has worked out very well without any scandal about contracts or anything else. But if you are going to be doing that, I would be real interested in hearing from you about it.

I have to say that I am troubled that Mayor Fenty declined the Subcommittee's invitation to testify, although I know he is very busy. I think that prior to the reform, Mayor Fenty said, "We have a crisis on our hands, and I am asking today for that responsibility of education reform to be placed squarely on my shoulders." And I had hoped that Mayor Fenty would be here today to testify.

As Mayor of Cleveland, I was very proud of the fact that Cleveland received three All America City Awards within a 5-year period. It never happened before, and it never has happened since. But I emphasized over and over again that the city could not be an All America City until we had an All America school system. And as I mentioned, we are still not there yet. And it seems to me that the District ought to be a model for the rest of the Nation. It should be that shining city on the hill, and people should come to the District and be able to see some of those innovative things happening in America and be the model for the rest of the country. And we have got a long way to go.

I would also like to mention the fact that—and Senator Akaka and I, I think, probably have a difference of opinion on this, but the scholarship program that we had here—and I know the President has recommended that you continue to fund it. But for the life of me, I cannot understand why that program can not continue for 1,700 children, and it is half the cost of the District, and the money that the kids would be getting, the District gets, so they are making out on the deal. And the reason I say that to you, all of you, is that this program started in Ohio in about 1995. This whole non-public school program started in Ohio, and I was told by the teachers' union that it was unconstitutional and so on and so forth. And

several years ago, the Supreme Court said that it was constitutional. The program can provide the kids an opportunity to get money to go to a non-public school. And today we have 5,600 kids in the school.

And I have to tell you, if you go back, their dropout rate is—I mean, relatively no dropout rate. About 90 percent of them have gone on to college, and so many of them now that I meet, they say, Senator, without that program I do not know where I would be today. And certainly I would like to see that available to everyone, and so I am sure that you would like to see that.

But I think that for the money put into it and the opportunity for those children and also the opportunity for some competitiveness is something that is very important. It is a benchmark. And I know it is not perfect, but I certainly would not want to snuff it out before it is given an opportunity to show what it can or cannot do.

The other thing that Senator Akaka and I have done, and that I really feel proud of, the D.C. Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program. I do not know about you, but it is one of the things that I am most proud of since I have been in the Senate. And I do not think many people are aware of the fact that I think you have increased your college attendance in the District by over 50 percent as a result of the program because a lot of our youngsters here just did not have the opportunity to go on to college because of the financial situation. And then I think Don Graham coming up with the College Assistance Program—and I have been to just about every graduation, and it is really heart-warming to see the kids talk about the opportunities that they have and where they are going, and so on. It is inspirational. And I would hope that we can see that program continue and see improvements in the District.

So I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing, and I am anxious to hear from our witnesses here today.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Voinovich. And now I would like to introduce our witnesses: Michelle Rhee, Chancellor of the D.C. Public Schools; Victor Reinoso, Deputy Mayor for Education; Kerri Briggs, Acting State Superintendent of Education, and Cornelia Ashby, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security at the Government Accountability Office.

As you know, it is the custom of our Subcommittee to swear in witnesses. Therefore, I ask all of you to please rise and 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. RHEE. I do.

Mr. REINOSO. I do.

Ms. BRIGGS. I do.

Ms. ASHBY. I do.

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

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

Chancellor Rhee, will you please begin with your statement?



**TESTIMONY OF MICHELLE RHEE,<sup>1</sup> CHANCELLOR, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Ms. RHEE. Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Voinovich. I am honored to testify today about education reform in the District of Columbia Public Schools and the findings of the GAO report.

In our Nation's capital, our education system can and should be a source of national pride. We know from the significant progress students have made in the last 2 years in D.C.—and from the results from high-performing urban schools across the country—that in good schools children of all backgrounds and circumstances can gain the skills that will allow them positive and fulfilling life choices. Urban schools can send their children to college at rates that can compete with suburban schools.

We also know how much work it will take to get there. Despite the progress of the past 2 years, the situation remains dire when less than half of our students can read, write, and do math at grade level. When Mayor Fenty gave me the privilege of reforming the school system to achieve this goal with him, we quickly discovered a few of the ways that schools were not supported to educate their students competitively.

For example, in 2007 brand-new textbooks sat unopened in warehouses while students sat in history classes with books that ended with Nixon's Presidency. The school system, owing money to teachers who had worked here years ago, at the same time was accidentally mailing checks to former employees who had not worked here for years—even when the employees were regularly calling to correct the problem. While one DCPS school showed 9 percent of its students were on grade level in mathematics, a successful charter school only a few blocks away showed 91 percent of its students were on grade level.

Parents responded, and between 1996 and 2007 the enrollment of the public school system dropped by about 40 percent as families without viable options in their neighborhood schools sought schools that would serve their children according to their rights and abilities.

Because of the sheer size of the problem, many thought it would be near impossible to resuscitate DCPS, never mind take student achievement beyond the high expectations we have for children in our country's top schools. However, after decades of poor achievement, under the leadership of Mayor Adrian Fenty we are applying the innovative solutions and common-sense practices that are beginning to turn the tide.

For the second year in a row, DCPS students have posted significant gains on our annual standardized test, the DC CAS. Second-year gains are more unusual than a first-year rise in scores, and we are pleased that in 2009 our principals and teachers brought gains across all grade levels and in both reading and math.

Our elementary students made significant gains in math and reading this year, moving from 40-percent proficiency in math last year to 49 percent this year, and from 46 percent proficiency in reading to 49 percent this year—on top of the encouraging gains

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<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Ms. Rhee appears in the Appendix on page 41.

achieved in year one. Our secondary students showed improvement as well this year, advancing from 39 to 41-percent proficiency in reading and 36 to 40-percent proficiency in math.

I have heard from many who argue that economically disadvantaged students are not as capable of learning as students from more affluent families, and that it is only “realistic” to assume that neighborhoods dominated by poor and minority students will remain caught in the cycles of poverty we see now. I am happy to see that our students have an answer for that.

In just 2 years in secondary math, students have narrowed the achievement gap that exists between white students and students of color by 20 percentage points, from 70 percent to 50 percent. The gap has narrowed across all grade levels and subject areas, and our students have made it clear that they intend to keep going. In fact, virtually every subgroup of students increased proficiency rates this year, including our students with special education needs, our English language learner (ELL) population, and our economically disadvantaged students. ELL students are outperforming the District as a whole in elementary reading, elementary math, and secondary math, with 20-percent gains in secondary reading over 2 years.

When we began this effort, when Mayor Fenty took over the schools, only one-third of our students were on grade level in reading and mathematics. Two years later, almost half of our students are on grade level in reading and math. Of course, the fact that only half our students are proficient is not a cause for celebration. But given where we once were, this is evidence of progress and a cause for hope.

The GAO report released last month represents the conclusion of nearly 2 years of ongoing evaluation and analysis. Overall, we agreed with many of the major recommendations from the draft report, though we have not seen the final report. As we have shared with the GAO team, the Mayor will continue to make constant evaluation and stakeholder input central and integral components of ensuring accountability under the governance structure.

We were somewhat perplexed, however, by the tone and specific conclusions of the GAO report, and we believe the report fell short of objectively conveying the context for the DCPS initiatives underway and of adequately capturing all of the progress that has been made to date. I would like to use my remaining time to explain some of the innovative reforms occurring at DCPS that have allowed us to make the gains we have seen in student achievement.

The rise in academic achievement over the last 2 years is in large part the result of months of hard work and dedication from our teachers and principals, and we still have a long way to go. There is no way to get around it. Without high-quality teachers and principals at every DCPS school, the achievement gap will not close and performance will not rise. We must support a teaching corps that is focused on student achievement, and we must recognize and reward them when they accomplish the enormous gains we are asking them to reach with students.

For many years, new teachers have struggled to “reinvent the wheel” of classroom management and planning without significant or sustained support from DCPS. But just as teachers are asked to

meet every individual child's academic needs, professional development must support teachers at all ends of the spectrum on their way toward mastery.

DCPS has established a higher commitment to professional development with a 400-percent increase in budgeted professional development resources for teachers. This has allowed us to hire teacher coaches to support reading and math instruction. The coaches work at the school level, getting to know teachers and their styles and practice to help new and struggling teachers advance their students' academic growth.

Building teacher capacity for excellence is the most important work of the past 2 years and the years to come. Nothing is more telling of this importance than the way students flock to our best teachers. In one of our high schools last year, a teacher was surprised to find students attending her class who were not on her roster. When she asked them why they were there, they said that they were learning from her, and that they wanted to attend her class whether or not they were getting credit for it.

Schools also need strong principals to succeed. In a district facing a challenge of this size, we need the best school leaders we can find, and we must support those we have to achieve according to their highest potential. As part of our aggressive human capital strategy, DCPS recruited over 49 proven instructional leaders for the 2008–2009 school year to replace principals who were unable to increase student achievement. Our new principals went on to outperform the District on the DC CAS this year. One of the new principals, Dwan Jordon, assumed leadership last year of Sousa Middle School in Ward 7, one of the city's highest poverty wards. In just 1 year, he galvanized his staff to move student achievement up 17 points in reading and 25 points in mathematics, allowing the school to meet AYP for the first time in Sousa's history.

When we hire or develop staff to achieve such results, our children cannot afford to lose them. To attract and retain highly effective staff we must dramatically change the way in which teachers and principals are compensated. Already, DCPS has provided incentives to teachers who helped their students realize school-wide gains of 20 percentage points or greater in both reading and math. And after the 2007–2008 school year, DCPS awarded cash bonuses to the staff at these seven schools. Teachers at these schools received an \$8,000 cash award, sending a clear message that if they perform at the highest level, they will be recognized and rewarded.

I have a lot more of the testimony, but I am going to just close here by saying that we do not have any illusions about the work that lies ahead of us. Right now in this city, a student's race and income remains a determining factor in the number and quality of choices that students will have upon exiting the public school system. This is inexcusable, and it becomes more painfully acute to anyone who visits our schools, speaks with our students, and sees directly how capable and curious they are.

We are working furiously to correct this injustice, and we have made significant progress over the past 2 years. The accomplishments we have shared with you, the most important of which belong to our students, we believe merit recognition in any measure or oversight of this rewarding work.

As we continue this forward movement with our school staff and students, we remain grateful for your support, and I am happy to answer any questions.

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

Mr. Reinoso, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF VICTOR REINOSO,<sup>1</sup> DEPUTY MAYOR FOR  
EDUCATION, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Mr. REINOSO. Good afternoon, Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before you today to report on the continued progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the Mayor's public education reform initiatives.

Over the past 2 years, the District has become a focal point for the national education reform community, and I believe what we are doing here and the progress we are making can and will serve as a model to other urban jurisdictions seeking to improve dramatically the public education opportunities available to children.

My office, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), was established to perform two main functions: First, to ensure that the education reform efforts of the District of Columbia Public Schools, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM), and the Ombudsman for Public Education are aligned in priorities and strategies; and, second, to marshal the District's resources, public and private, education and non-education, to support education reform efforts and outcomes for all the District's students. My office has made significant progress on these fronts, and I am happy to share some of that progress today.

From the beginning, the Mayor has asked us to focus on implementation and accountability for results. In preparing to take over the school system, we noted numerous reports and plans that had been developed and subsequently piled up over the years and resolved to hold ourselves accountable for execution and results. My office's role is to make sure we are all moving at the same pace, on the same page, and on the right track. We problem-solve where there are obstacles or issues, keep staff focused on the agenda, and develop the right strategy to address a given issue.

Alignment of strategies comes in many forms, but almost always involves convening the right people around the table. Prior to the Mayor's reform, this was the missing piece. City leaders would constantly hear the complaint from agencies that the school system was not at the table and, likewise, the school system would complain that they had little or no collaboration with other city agencies.

Alignment of reform strategies became even more important as we separated State from local education functions and facilities and other education-related services from the school system.

We have established several mechanisms for regular, agenda-driven communication among the education agencies at leadership and staff levels. My office also leads working groups and conversa-

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<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Reinoso appears in the Appendix on page 51.

tions around specific big-picture priority issues such as special education and school health.

Similarly, at the program level, the DME has worked with both DCPS and the OSSE on developing strategies and policies for alternative education, discipline and attendance, and adult education programming.

Finally, my office continues to work closely with DCPS, OPEFM, and city planning staff around school facilities planning, and the Mayor recently submitted to the council a revised Master Facilities Plan that will modernize every classroom over the next 5 years.

Through these efforts, I am confident that the education strategies and policies of the District agencies are aligned. The June 2009 draft GAO report came to the same conclusion after careful review.

The other major focus of the DME over the past 2 years has been the initiatives associated with the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC). Identifying the needs of children and families inside and outside of the classroom and figuring out how to address them by creating innovation and coordinating existing efforts within other agencies is challenging and intense. However, early results are promising and demonstrate that we are on the right track.

Part of our charge from the Public Education Reform Act is to develop and incubate innovative programs that address issues affecting social and emotional development of students, school climate and safety, and alcohol and substance abuse. We do this by researching and selecting evidence-based programs and initiatives and then piloting them carefully at the school level. At the end of the pilot period, the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and then transition them to a home agency where they can be scaled up and implemented permanently.

This past school year, we successfully implemented the DC Student Assessment and Resilience Team (START) multidisciplinary school mental health and intervention program. We hired seven social worker clinicians to serve students at six DCPS elementary schools and one middle school. We strongly believe in the DC START model and its comprehensive approach to early intervention.

In addition to DC START, ICSIC has implemented four other evidence-based programs this year. Combined, we are serving over 5,500 students at 50 schools. Adding in the other programs, we have trained over 300 DCPS, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), and Department of Mental Health (DMH) staff working in schools over the past 8 months. My office works steadily on monitoring these programs and their implementation, reaching out to school-based staff to ensure that the programs are utilized effectively and have the maximum positive impact.

We continue to work across agencies through ICSIC to improve outcomes related to health, student achievement, youth engagement, and transition to adulthood. The goal of all of these efforts is to provide a safer, more supportive learning environment for students so that they can take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

While I think the Subcommittee can agree that we have made substantial progress in only 2 years, no doubt we have much work left to be done. With this in mind, we endeavor to continue moving forward with an unwavering commitment to implementation and results.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues. I look forward to your questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Mr. Reinoso. Ms. Briggs, will you please proceed with your statement?

**STATEMENT OF KERRI L. BRIGGS, PH.D.,<sup>1</sup> ACTING STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Ms. BRIGGS. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, Committee staff, and guests. I am Kerri Briggs, and I serve as the Acting State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia. It is my pleasure to be here this afternoon to discuss the role of the Office of the State Superintendent and the Mayor's effort to reform education.

It is truly a special time for education reform in the District. We have a mayor, a city council, a schools chancellor, charter school leaders, and a State Board of Education who are all dedicated to improving schools for our students. Thousands of dedicated teachers and other staff are joining as well and embracing a new culture of achievement.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education was created 2 years ago to comply with Federal education law, and it is designated as a State education agency. This office was created to manage Federal funds so that DCPS and the 57 charter local education agencies (LEAs) could focus on working with schools.

In my short time in serving in this role, I have identified certain challenges ahead of us, one of which is discussed in the report. In 2006 and again last year, the U.S. Department of Education placed D.C. schools on high-risk status due to mismanagement of grants and failure to comply with Federal rules.

After nearly 8 years with the U.S. Department of Education, I know the ins and outs of the system. I have seen firsthand how the relationship between Federal, State, and local agencies can have a profound impact on kids. I am confident the priorities we are setting at the State level will maximize the impact of the Chancellor's reform efforts.

That is why my colleagues and I have been working diligently to correct these problems. OSSE is working with the U.S. Department of Education to address our high-risk grantee status through the design and implementation of a comprehensive and strategic corrective action plan. Addressing these issues around our high-risk designation is OSSE's top priority, and a dedicated team of analysts has been assembled and moved to my executive office to steward this reform effort.

We are also set to distribute funds smartly to LEAs to advance the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) principles set forth by the U.S. Department of Education. Receiving Federal

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Ms. Briggs appears in the Appendix on page 58.

stimulus funds and our high-risk grantee status are providing OSSE with a new opportunity to set standards around Federal grants management. We will also take advantage of the ARRA reporting requirements to gather and analyze data that will in turn inform future policy decisions.

While we are cleaning up our business operations, we are also working on efforts to improve student achievement. My team is currently assessing our data systems and capabilities and will work aggressively to improve upon them to make data an effective tool at the school, District, and State level. The first step in that process is to develop and implement the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data (SLED) System.

Once built, this database will enable the sharing of critical information that tracks student learning, spanning early child care, preschool, K-12, post-secondary, and adult-serving institutions.

During this past year, the production of the Unique Student Identifier (USI), which included student demographic information, was released. The USI is the key lever for linking all student data together within the SLED System and with all other educational systems within OSSE.

The State Superintendent's Office also sets teacher quality criteria as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. As of October 2006, OSSE changed its criteria to align with the Federal definition of "highly qualified teachers." Under this definition, all teachers must have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree, State certification, and demonstrated subject area knowledge through a competency test, an evaluation, or completion of additional degrees.

Accountability extends to more than our students, teachers, and schools. It also extends to our internal management performance. In an effort to create a culture of accountability, the ePerformance management system was launched in October 2008. It established clear expectations for all staff.

ePerformance has been operational since January 2009, and OSSE is successfully moving through that implementation timeline. I am confident that the system is setting clear expectations for all employees, which is an important part of working towards achieving OSSE's strategic objectives.

The reforms that the District has put in place represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform a previously broken school system. Likewise, our strategic plan will make the State Superintendent's Office more nimble, more responsive, and more accountable to families and taxpayers. It means issuing clear and timely guidance to help educators access available resources. It means focusing energy and resources on the challenges identified in the OSSE strategic plan—that is, grants management, quality special education, and the need for a reliable data system to track student achievement.

It also means collaborating with other States to develop rigorous, internationally benchmarked, common core standards to make sure that when D.C. students graduate from high school, they are prepared to succeed in college and to compete in the global marketplace.

The good news is that we are seeing results. As the Chancellor noted, results are up across the board, both in DCPS and also in

charter schools. But as you know, my agency does not always work directly with schools, but we can and must develop an effective and efficient State education agency to ensure that our talented educators are supported by this agency and not deterred. If we do a better job of allocating resources and human capital, they will have greater freedom to help our students improve.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Briggs. Ms. Ashby, will you please proceed with your statement?

**TESTIMONY OF CORNELIA M. ASHBY,<sup>1</sup> DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND INCOME SECURITY, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE**

Ms. ASHBY. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss DCPS's efforts to reform the District's public schools. This afternoon, my remarks will focus on steps DCPS has taken to address student academic achievement, teacher and principal quality, strategic planning, and its accountability and performance.

With respect to student academic achievement, following passage of the Public Education Reform Act, DCPS quickly implemented several initiatives, including supplemental instruction and practice to improve the basic skills and test scores of students struggling in reading and math; providing all schools with art, music, and physical education teachers, as well as supports such as social workers; restructuring schools that had not met academic goals for 6 consecutive years; and along with the State Superintendent's Office, developing new ways to use data to monitor student and school performance.

Based on lessons learned, DCPS is making changes as it continues these initiatives. For example, the Chancellor recently acknowledged that DCPS, in its effort to remedy the range of issues that plague the school system, may have launched too many initiatives at once, and some schools may not have had the capacity to implement them all. To support such schools, DCPS is considering allowing principals to determine which programs best suit their schools' needs and capacity. In addition, rather than focusing on implementing initiatives, for the 2009–2010 school year, DCPS will focus on effective teaching by helping teachers understand what students are expected to learn, how to prepare lessons, and effective teaching methods.

In attempting to strengthen teacher and principal quality, DCPS focused on a workforce replacement strategy, hiring, for the 2008–2009 school year, 566 teachers and 46 principals to replace about one-fifth of the teachers and one-third of the principals who had been on board during the 2007–2008 school year and had resigned, retired, or were terminated.

However, DCPS officials told us that the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 school system teacher evaluation process did not allow them to determine whether the teacher workforce improved in terms of impact on student achievement between these two school years. DCPS plans to revise its teacher evaluation process to assess teach-

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Ms. Ashby appears in the Appendix on page 66.



ers, in part, on their ability to improve students' test scores over the course of a school year.

In addition to the workforce replacement strategy, DCPS introduced new professional development initiatives, including hiring 150 teacher coaches for the 2008–2009 school year to improve teacher skills in delivering reading and math instruction.

The State Superintendent's Office and DCPS each developed 5-year strategic plans and involved stakeholders in the process. However, while DCPS has increased efforts to involve stakeholders in strategic planning and key initiatives, DCPS has initiated some key initiatives with limited stakeholder involvement. For example, key stakeholders, including D.C. Council members and parent groups, told us they were not given the opportunity to provide input on DCPS's initial proposals regarding school closures and consolidations; the establishment of schools that span pre-kindergarten to grade 8; or planning an early implementation of a new staffing model that placed art, music, and physical education teachers at schools and fundamentally changed the way funding is allocated to schools.

DCPS has taken steps to improve its accountability and performance which include developing scorecards for central office departments to identify performance expectations and discussing progress with senior-level managers at weekly meetings with the Chancellor, and assessing central office employee performance twice a year. However, while according to DCPS officials, DCPS has taken steps to align central office departmental scorecards with 2009 annual performance goals, DCPS has not yet explicitly linked employee performance evaluations to its overall goals. DCPS officials told us they plan to do so this summer.

The challenge of reforming the District's public schools is daunting, and DCPS and other members of the Mayor's education team have taken bold steps to improve the learning environment of the District's students. In moving forward, in order to sustain the progress achieved over the past 2 years and effectively implement new reform initiatives, it is important that DCPS have planning processes that ensure timely communication with stakeholders, including stakeholders within the school system who are knowledgeable about such things as individual school needs and capacity constraints, and incorporation of their views in decisions, and that central office employees are held accountable for contributing to the achievement of DCPS's goals.

As the Chairman said in his opening statement, in our report—which is being released consecutively with this hearing—we make two recommendations that could improve the implementation and sustainability of reform efforts. We recommended that the Mayor direct DCPS to (1) establish planning processes that include mechanisms to evaluate its internal capacity and communicate information to stakeholders, and when appropriate, incorporate their views, and (2) link individual performance evaluations to the agency's overall goals.

In commenting on a draft of the report, the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Chancellor, and the State Superintendent said they agreed with the substance of our recommendations.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Ms. Ashby, for your statement.

And now we have other Members here that I will call on for any opening statements you may have. Let me call on Senator Burris.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BURRIS**

Senator BURRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I did have an opening statement. I am sorry I had to duck out. I have another meeting. But I am deeply concerned about the structure, Mr. Chairman, and I will have a lot of questions about that when I do this opening statement.

Charles Keating, a great American inventor, once said, “High achievement always takes place in a framework of high expectations.” High expectations have been placed on the D.C. Public School system, as they should be for every public school system across our Nation. Expectations are met with dedication, teamwork, and by adhering to a strategic plan that moves toward an end goal—in this case, responsible reform of the District’s public schools.

Coming from Illinois, I understand the hardship involved in reforming and maintaining a high-quality public school system. The Chicago Public School system is the third largest school system in our country. It is evident that improvement does not solely rest on the shoulders of our teachers. School infrastructure, safe classrooms, and the involvement of the stakeholders like the local community and public officials are just some of the factors that contribute to the success of today’s youth.

Our communities face unique challenges when it comes to public education. I attend this hearing today to examine the progress of the District schools under this new structure, but I also hope to gain insight on lessons learned along the way.

Being a grandfather myself and having witnessed the importance that education has had on my children, I hold a special place in my heart for educational reform. The purpose of getting an education is not just to further oneself in the professional realm, but to instill a sense of intellectual curiosity in future generations.

Senator Akaka, I know that, you being a former public school principal and teacher, this is an issue close to your heart. I am glad that I am here today to participate in this hearing. I do not know what your questions will be, but I do have some concerns about the structure, workings, and progress in these 2 years of reform.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you for your opening statement. Senator Ensign.

Senator ENSIGN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will just wait until it is questioning time. Thank you, though.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Senator Landrieu.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANDRIEU**

Senator LANDRIEU. Mr. Chairman, I will also submit my opening statement for the record, and I am, unfortunately, going to have to slip out in just a few minutes. But I wanted to comment, let my

presence be a signal that I want to be very supportive of the reform efforts underway and to congratulate you all for what you have done thus far. And I look forward to working with the Chairman and the Members of this Subcommittee to continue to work with you in a strong partnership until we get the District of Columbia schools to become among the top in the Nation, just like we are working on many of our other districts around the country. And under the appropriate jurisdictional models that we have, I really think that it is possible. I think that there are some exciting experiments and initiatives underway that are showing a lot of promise, and I just think we have to continue to push forward. So I thank you all very much.

[The prepared statement of Senator Landrieu follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANDRIEU

Thank you, Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Voinovich for convening this important hearing. Over 5 years ago, I worked together with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft a fair, responsible and visionary approach to public school reform in the District of Columbia. It is critical that we review and assess how education reform has impacted student achievement in our Nation's capital.

DC Public Schools have long been in dire straits. It is tragic that children attending public schools in our Nation's capital receive sub-par educations. The achievement gap is 70 percentage points between black and whites in the city's high schools. Only 9 percent of D.C. high school students will graduate from a college within 5 years of leaving the city's system. Only 8 percent of ninth-graders are proficient in math. Our children languish in schools that do not provide them with the education they need to thrive in life and become successful adults. In addition to losing generations of children unprepared for the workforce, we lose countless potential workers who could help maintain our global competitiveness.

However, there are reasons to be hopeful. Chancellor Michelle Rhee has brought about dramatic reforms into the school system. It is clear from the testimonies of the witnesses here today that significant progress towards reform has been made; however, we still have a long road in front of us until reform is fully achieved. The latest GAO report has recommended the Mayor direct DCPS to involve stakeholders more during key decisions. As a matter of two school-aged kids, I know how crucial it is to keep parents involved in these discussions and listen to their input. The DCPS steady gains in reading and math at the elementary and secondary levels is both promising and a sign that we are getting closer to putting DC schools on the right path. Still, we must focus on how to keep improving these scores in the long run.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Landrieu.

Chancellor Rhee, the GAO report indicates that DCPS may have undertaken too many initiatives at once. I understand you are using a new Teaching and Learning Framework to evaluate which initiatives should continue and are effective.

Will you please describe this new framework and how you are implementing it?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. I believe that what the GAO report was referring to was the fact that I communicated to teachers formally the fact that I knew that lots of them felt overwhelmed because we had a number of new initiatives over the last 2 years. Part of the challenge that we face is when you come into the lowest-performing school district in the country where things really are so dysfunctional and there is so much work to be done, we had a lot of enthusiasm for trying to tackle as many of those challenges as we could as quickly as we could. And a lot of this was in response to teachers and principals coming to us and saying, "We need more resources. We need more programs. We need more guidance around

high school civics classes or around Algebra I or reading interventions at the elementary level,” etc.

And so as people were telling us what the needs were, we rolled out a lot of new initiatives. And, to hear it from the teacher vantage point, they would say, “We do not have any problem with the individual initiatives, but taken in a sum total, it is somewhat overwhelming to know that we are having to implement all of them.”

So what we have done to try to differentiate a little from school to school and teacher to teacher is to roll out a new Teaching and Learning Framework—and that will happen this summer—that basically lays a foundation for what our expectations are when we walk into a classroom and we walk into a school, and to make those very clear so we have very clear rubrics that identify what we expect to see.

Then on top of that, we will have a toolbox where we have District-approved programs, interventions, various initiatives around reading, math, early childhood, special education, etc. And schools can look at the toolbox in total, determine what the needs of their particular classrooms and schools are, and then utilize those programs as they feel they have the capacity to take them on. So we will provide a little bit more flexibility in that way to be able to differentiate from school to school.

Senator AKAKA. I believe solid training and mentoring are crucial in molding successful teachers. I understand that you are using teacher coaches, as you mentioned, and have created a principals’ academy.

Can you tell me more about these and other initiatives to train and mentor educators?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. On the teacher side, there were two main initiatives that happened over the course of the last 2 years. The first is the instructional coaches. What we found when we came to the District was that professional development was happening to teachers in a very disjointed way. So they would go to workshops or trainings that were at various times on different subjects, but there was no cohesion or alignment to those professional development initiatives.

Then the second thing that we got feedback on was that teachers felt that the trainings, themselves, were too separate or too distant from what was happening every day in their schools and their classrooms. So we invested a significant amount of money and resources in ensuring that we could hire at least one, and sometimes two instructional coaches for every school, and that was actually part of our comprehensive staffing model.

So now we have a full-time person in every school whose job it is to actually go into classrooms, to observe teachers, people who know the children, the circumstances, who can build personal relationships with folks, so that the professional development that is happening is much more meaningful and it is job-embedded.

The second component was that we are working towards a full-time release mentor model for new teachers, so the standards of new teacher mentorship is that you have another teacher, either in the building or somewhere else, who gets paid, a small stipend to help that teacher on the side. And for a lot of our new teachers

that level of support just is not enough to acclimate them to the challenges of our schools. So what we have moved towards is a mentor model where we have full-time mentors who have a case-load of new teachers, and their job and responsibility, is to travel between the classrooms of those teachers and provide full-time mentoring to them.

On the principal academy side as well, we have put a tremendous amount of resources into ensuring that on a very regular basis we are meeting with principals, pulling them together, and covering topics with them that they believe they need in order to build their skill base.

Senator AKAKA. Chancellor, GAO indicated that the DCPS currently is using a core staffing model to increase student access to subjects like art and music. As a former music teacher, I believe these types of classes are valuable for young people.

Please elaborate on how DCPS determines which subjects to offer and how many staff to assign to each school.

Ms. RHEE. Sure. When I came into this job, one of the most surprising things that I heard, but also one of the most pervasive, was a feeling from people, from families in different parts of the city, that they did not understand why they were getting different resources than schools in other parts of the city. And a common refrain that I heard was, "We do not have an art teacher, a music teacher, or a physical education (PE) teacher. Why do the schools west of the park have all of those things?"

And what we found was that it was not for a lack of resources per se, but that schools—at the individual school level, principals were making decisions about what kinds of teachers they were going to hire and where they were going to spend their money, and that those decisions were not consistent across the District. And what that resulted in was people, unfortunately, gaining a perspective where they began to think that art, music, and PE were extra-curricular activities instead of what I believe they should be seen as, which is an integral part to any broad-based, robust curriculum.

So what we did was to say that there was a core staffing model that every school, regardless of what part of the city it was in, how many children it was serving, all of those students deserved to have access to art, music, PE, to librarians, to full-time nurses. So that was an important part of what we were doing.

We also added social workers and/or a counselor at every school, and we wanted to set that benchmark for what that comprehensive staffing model looked like overall. So that even though we could not necessarily ensure that the entire staffing model existed at every single school, we wanted to set the benchmark out and draw the line in the sand that said this is what we are striving towards.

In terms of determining how many of each of those kinds of staff members are at every school, it is based on the number of pupils that are at that particular building.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. In April, as I mentioned in my statement, I wrote to you and Mayor Fenty and the Administration regarding the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, and I was very pleased to receive a response from Secretary of Education Duncan. In fact, I got back to her, and she got back to me, and, unfortunately, nei-

ther you nor Mayor Fenty responded. And, Mr. Reinoso, I would like you to let the Mayor know I want an answer to my letter.

Since I have not received a response, I was hoping, Chancellor, that you might share with me your thoughts on the D.C. Opportunity Program in terms of supporting the District's efforts to ensure each student has access to a quality education, and I would be interested in knowing how you feel about the recommendation that only those that are in it are going to be able to participate and you are going to shut off any other people from participating.

Ms. RHEE. So my belief about vouchers I think probably is very different from most Democrats—I am a Democrat—here is the bottom line. I do not believe that vouchers are the answer to the problems in public education today. The bottom line is that the amount of the vouchers do not allow children access to some of the highest-quality private schools that are in existence, and just by virtue of having a voucher, it does not guarantee you admission into a school. And so with those dynamics in place, it is not the answer to the problem.

That said, I do think that given the situation that our families face today, vouchers can be an important part to the choice dynamic that I think is healthier here in Washington, DC, than almost any other city in the country. We have a tri-sector approach where we have a robust charter community, we have the Opportunity Scholarships Program, and then we have the reforms going on DCPS.

I answer e-mails from hundreds and hundreds of families every year who come to me and say— we do exactly what we would want them to do as families. So they do the research and they say, “My neighborhood school is not up to snuff. I applied to all of these schools out of boundary. I was not awarded a seat in any of those schools.” And so they come to me and say, “Now what am I supposed to do?”

I think that is a valid question because the bottom line is we have some high-performing schools in the district, but those schools do not have a lot of seats for out-of-boundary kids.

I believe that in those circumstances we ought to be able to provide those families with some choices so that they can move out, or not have to place those children in those failing schools, and I believe that the Opportunity Scholarships Program and the continuation of the tri-sector approach is one way that can happen.

In the long term, I am not sure what that solution is going to be, but at least for where we are now and given how far we have yet to go. I believe that the tri-sector approach continues to make sense.

The Deputy Mayor, the Mayor, and I have consistently been vocal advocates of the fact that this tri-sector approach be maintained and continued into the future.

Senator VOINOVICH. Thank you. It is also troubling to me that because of contractual agreements, teachers who are not meeting basic expectations are being transferred to other schools instead of being removed from the school system. And I would be interested to know what is the rationale for transferring poor performers from one school to another. And how does the DCPS decide where those teachers are going to be placed? And the real question—and I think

it gets to the report that was done—is whether or not you have the kind of performance evaluations that should be linked to the school system's goals.

In other words, the problem is you are a good teacher, you are a bad teacher. How do you determine whether they are good or bad? And if you have objective standards and everybody kind of agrees that is the standard, you are much better off in terms of making a decision regarding that individual. But what bothers me is that now under the present system, if you think someone does not have it, you move them to someplace else.

Ms. RHEE. That is right.

Senator VOINOVICH. It seems to me that if they are not performing, there ought to be a provision that says we will help you, and if you are unable to be helped, you have to be terminated.

Ms. RHEE. That is exactly right. You started your question by asking what sense does that make, and it doesn't make any sense. And that is why we are working so diligently to change the teachers union contracts and the provisions within that, because the reality is that—and I will give you a concrete example. We were looking to reconstitute two of our lowest-performing high schools this year. "Reconstitution" means that all of the teachers have to re-apply for their jobs, and then the new Administration can choose the teachers that they want, and the other ones are dispersed.

This creates a situation, though, that is incredibly troublesome on many fronts because say there are about 100 teachers at each of these high schools, that means that there are potentially upwards of 200 teachers who, by the current teachers union contract that we have, we owe them a job. We have to place them before we can hire new teachers into the system.

And so we leave the other 10 large comprehensive high schools in a situation where essentially any new teachers that they are going to hire, they are going to have to choose—these 200 displaced teachers are eventually going to get forced onto these 10 schools, some of them who are just hanging on by their fingernails, they are just one level above where these two lowest-performing ones are. And by having an influx of 15, 20 new teachers that they do not have any say over—these people are forced into their schools—can be incredibly detrimental to the school culture and to any progress that the school is making.

We do not think that this is a system that is thinking about the best interests of student achievement at its core. We believe that it is a system that is detrimental to the culture of accountability that we are trying to establish. And that is why we are working so vigorously to try to change these provisions to ensure that a school has a right to choose the teachers actively and on the other side that teachers have a say in where they are going, and that we are not creating a system where poor performers are being shuffled throughout the system.

Senator VOINOVICH. And you need the union to agree to that?

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator VOINOVICH. What is the prospect of that happening?

Ms. RHEE. Well, we are working on it. It varies by the day sometimes. We have made some very good progress over the last 2 months. We have asked the Dean of the Howard Law School, Kurt

Schmoke, to serve as a mediator between the union and the District as it comes to those negotiations. His involvement has been absolutely critical. It has really taken us an incredibly long distance from where we were before he was involved. And he remains very hopeful that we will be able to come to resolution.

I do not know at the end of the day whether that will occur, but we are hopeful, and both the union and the District have articulated on many occasions that our ideal on both sides would be that we would try to come to resolution on a new contract before the beginning of the next school year.

Senator VOINOVICH. Mr. Chairman, if you do not mind, I would just like to say that when I was governor, in the area in Ohio where you lived, in Toledo, we were able to work an agreement that basically said that a teacher could ask for help, other teachers could ask for help for them, or the principal could ask for help. We provided additional money for master teachers, and I think that is what you are—in your testimony, you are trying to do that. And then they would be given an opportunity to shape up, and after that, if they did not, then they were gone. But that was the way we compromised it. Unfortunately, that program is no longer in existence. But it is the kind of thing you are trying to work something out with the teachers to try and make sure that the people that really are not—I mean, the teachers, I think most of them, are just as interested in having good teachers. If they have a bad teacher, they know it, and they should be able to say, “Hey, you need some help.” And a lot of teachers maybe know they are not that good. They ought to be able to come in and say, “I need help,” or the principal should be able to do that. And I think if they have been given an opportunity to go through that process, that is fair, and then if they cannot make it, then usually what happens is you get terminated.

Ms. RHEE. That is right. As you noted, in my hometown of Toledo, Ohio, that is one of the districts that really piloted and sort of pioneered the Peer Assistance and Review Program.

In our new evaluation model that we will be implementing this school year, we have taken a lot of the best components of that by having a peer master educator be a significant part of the evaluation and observation process for teachers, and that component has been extremely well received amongst our teaching force.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you, Senator Voinovich. Senator Burris.

Senator BURRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Will there be a second round on this?

Senator AKAKA. Yes, there will be.

Senator BURRIS. Because I have so many questions, and I want to deal with structure in this round and then education in the next round. I am looking at an organizational chart in reference to, Madam Chancellor, who you report to, and the Chancellor is reporting to the Mayor, and the Deputy Mayor for Education is reporting to the Mayor. Is that correct?

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator BURRIS. And then there is a component called the State Board of Education. I would assume that in the legislation they created a State Board so that you all could be comparable to a State, so that you can get State funds or something? I am trying



to see this entity. How many students are in the D.C. Public School system? Two hundred thousand? What is the number?

Ms. RHEE. There are about 47,000 students in the D.C. Public Schools in the traditional public schools. And then there are an additional between 27,000 and 30,000 in the charter schools.

Mr. REINOSO. So a total of about 77,000 public school students in the city attending either DCPS or charter schools.

Senator BURRIS. You have charter schools.

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator BURRIS. And you have this structure with a State Board of Education which reports—on my chart I am looking at, the State Superintendent has some contact with the Chancellor. And then, otherwise, the State Superintendent of Education comes under the Deputy Mayor. It looks like to me you do report somewhat to the State Board of Education. And, by the way, I do not see D.C. being a State. I cannot understand this because to me we have 50 States. I did not know we had 51, Mr. Chairman, but now I see we view the District of Columbia as a State when it wants to be, as a city when it wants to be, as a county when it needs to be, and it has all these jurisdictions that are very confusing, this bureaucracy to deal with 47,000 students in your public school system.

And so what is your background, Deputy Mayor? Are you an educator?

Mr. REINOSO. I was a former member of the school board.

Senator BURRIS. You were a member of the school board. The local school board, which no longer exists.

Mr. REINOSO. Correct.

Senator BURRIS. Now there is a State Board, which I thought the Superintendent reports to the State Board.

Mr. REINOSO. If I may, I will try to provide some context, which hopefully will clear up some of the confusion. One of the reasons that the District was placed on high-risk status by the U.S. Department of Education, had to do with commingling of State and local education responsibilities, which, by Federal law, are to be separate. And so the State structure that exists in the District, while it is true we aspire to that status, it addresses a necessary component of Federal legislation requiring that Federal dollars flow through and be monitored and be granted out by the State Department of Education, and that those decisions be separated from any local school district so as to avoid conflicts of interest in reporting and/or in the doling out of those Federal grant dollars.

And so that is a key reason why you see a separate State structure. It also is why the reporting structure is different so that the oversight on a day-to-day basis of the State responsibilities is separate from DCPS. And so that is why the Chancellor reports directly through the Mayor and why the State office reports through me, to create some distance between the reporting structure and not to have the same person overseeing the two entities on a day-to-day basis.

The State Superintendent is appointed by the Mayor, serves for a term position, does not report to the State Board, but works—

Senator BURRIS. The State Superintendent does not report to the State Board. The State Superintendent reports to the Mayor.

Mr. REINOSO. Yes.

Senator BURRIS. And the Deputy Mayor—

Mr. REINOSO. To the Deputy Mayor, rather. To me.

Senator BURRIS. And who do you report to?

Mr. REINOSO. I report to the Mayor. I mean, ultimately there is only so many places a reporting structure can end up.

Senator BURRIS. I know the system was designed before I got here, but I am just trying to get an understanding, because given my knowledge of this process and procedures, I just see an administrative boondoggle here. I want to know where you all are going to be 2 or 3 or 4 years from now trying to be a State. I understand what you are trying to do, because most States have a State Board of Education where there is a State Superintendent of Education. I assume that is what the structure was seeking to do.

Mr. REINOSO. Yes, and—

Senator BURRIS. That is done by the Governor.

Mr. REINOSO. Right.

Senator BURRIS. And then you get into your local school district or your municipalities, and you take the big district like Chicago, for example, when our legislature then gave the responsibility to the Mayor of Chicago, that was done out of political motivations. And based on that, the Mayor now hires a CEO, and we have 400,000 students in the Chicago Public School District—400,000, and its bureaucracy is not as cumbersome as this here.

So I am just hoping that you all can get through as to who has what responsibility in this regard.

Mr. REINOSO. I appreciate that, given the small number of students and the small geographic footprint of the city, that it seems like a number of entities. But if you layer in the Illinois State into that, you would find a similar structure.

Senator BURRIS. A similar structure for 2 million students not for 40,000.

Mr. REINOSO. I appreciate that, and, again, we are very much focused on meeting the Federal requirements for the separation of the State and of the LEA. I am sure that the Chairman of the Subcommittee, from his own experience—Hawaii is another place where there are some similarities in terms of the local and State functions having been in one place. And the struggle of separating those out has been for us a challenge, but we have made a tremendous amount of progress, and keeping that separation. And so as a result, keeping the kind of structure that at the typical city level seems redundant is a necessity, in fact, mandated by the Federal laws on the separation of—

Senator BURRIS. I understand it is mandated by statute, but I am also going to empathize or sympathize with you all that have to try to work under this bureaucracy. I mean, I am not criticizing.

Mr. REINOSO. I understand.

Senator BURRIS. As a newcomer to this, I am just assessing it and pointing it out, and I want to be on record as saying I hope that you all can survive through this on such a smaller scale, but to try to make yourself comparable to one of the 50 States is what is creating the problem. And then the limited number of students—we want this to get down to the classroom. I am looking at all this bureaucracy that is going to be here, and where we want to be getting is in those classrooms with those students, with educational,

tools and guidelines so that those kids will not end up in prison, jail, or as liabilities to society.

And so I just hope that this structure—I do not know. I have some questions for GAO as they assess this. I hope that GAO stays on top of especially the bureaucracy and the interaction between the Chancellor, the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, all in one little kit and caboodle. You are trying to put all of that structure into—we will just say 70,000 students, which to me is—

My time is up, Mr. Chairman.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you, Senator Burris. We will have a second round.

Senator BURRIS. Thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Senator Ensign.

Senator ENSIGN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If we change Federal law, to follow up on this question, could you do without the bureaucracy that you are talking about?

Ms. RHEE. I think part of the issue that exists is because close to a third of the school-aged children in this city are enrolled in charter schools, there has to be an entity outside of DCPS that can oversee the Federal dollars that flow to all of the LEAs. So even though there is only one official school district, there are more than 50 LEAs because so many of these individual charter schools are their own LEAs.

Senator ENSIGN. Just to simplify it, though, is there a change in Federal law that needs to be had so you could streamline the bureaucracy? Could you do with less bureaucracy if we changed the Federal rules?

Ms. RHEE. We could always deal with less bureaucracy. Less bureaucracy is a good thing. But I do think that there has to be an entity that oversees both the District's and the other 50 LEAs.

Senator ENSIGN. There may be some way we can work together or something. If there is a change in Federal law that needs to happen for you to be able to do with less bureaucracy, we should work on trying to do that.

I found it very interesting when you are talking about not being able to fire bad teachers. We have a wonderful place in Las Vegas called West Prep. It was called West Junior High School. One hundred percent of the students are low-income students; I think 98 percent of them are minorities. It was considered the worst school in Las Vegas—actually, the worst school in the entire State of Nevada several years ago, and a real reform-minded educator took it over, hired a young principal, and the young principal said, "OK. I will take it over, but I want to be able to choose the teachers," similar to what you just talked about. Out of the 65 teachers, he kept 13.

You walk in there today, and, by the way, they have school uniforms. They extended the school day by an hour a day. He wants to take it, instead of it just being a junior high, he has expanded it out, eventually wants it to be a K-12 school because he does not want the kids ruined before they get to him or ruined after they leave him.

I went into the chemistry class when I was out there, a young African American girl in a chemistry lab, and I said to her—she was there before the changes were made. And I said, "What is the

difference, the main difference between now and before?" And she said, "Oh, it is very simple. We actually get to learn now." I mean, that is such a sad statement, but I think indicative of a lot of our failing schools today.

The good news, after the changes that were made, is the energy in these teachers. You walk in this school, and you have just never seen energy—I do not care, private school, public school, wherever I have been.

So 3 years ago, West Prep was given freedom to operate within the regular public school system. Three years ago, only 17 percent of the kids performed at grade level at math. Today, 97 percent of juniors are proficient in reading, 73 percent in math, and 64 percent in science. That is what can happen when people put kids first. You mentioned that in your statement, and that is really to me what it is all about.

The D.C. Scholarship Program, I agree with you, I do not think that vouchers are a silver bullet and are going to solve all of our educational problems. I do believe that they are one of the answers, just like I believe charter schools are one of the answers, because I believe competition actually works to improve things.

But, also, this idea of teacher tenure in elementary and high school is the most—excuse my language—asinine thing that I have just ever heard of. Tenure was put in for college professors so they would not be fired because of political beliefs. So after they were there, they had kind of earned their stripes, they could not be fired for political beliefs. That was the original reason for tenure, and now to do it in my home State, I do not know. How long is it before they basically get this contract? Is it 1 year or 2 years here?

Ms. RHEE. Before they have tenure? It is 2 years.

Senator ENSIGN. Two years.

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator ENSIGN. First of all, at colleges, it is a lot longer than that. In my State it is 1 year. And it is just ridiculous that we talk to any high school kid today or their parent and ask them, "Did you have any bad teachers along the way?" Well, it does not take that many bad teachers to ruin a kid's education, and we really have to put people on the line, and parents have to get involved and take our schools back for our kids. That really is—because education is the future for our kids. If we want our kids competing in the 21st Century—and they are not today competing the way that they should, especially in the areas of science and math, they are not competing in the 21st Century.

I think that you all have some great ideas, and I followed some of the things that you all are doing, and I want to applaud you for it and just continue to encourage you to get out there and speak, and get parents involved, and take our schools back away from the special interests and put them back where they belong, and that is, for the kids.

I am going to continue to fight up here with Senator Lieberman, Senator Voinovich, and others that believe in, at least, the Opportunity Scholarship Program and giving you more flexibility, and if there are other things that can free you from some of the bureaucratic rules that it would allow you more freedom to change the schools and put the kids first, please come to us and please tell us,

because we want to work with you because it really is just about the kids and their future. And that is all we want to do.

I really did not have a question because you answered actually—from some of these other people, you already answered some of my questions, but I want to get some of those statements on the record. So I thank all of you for what you are doing, and let us continue to work to put the kids first.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Ensign.

Chancellor Rhee, do you have a further response to Senator Ensign?

Ms. RHEE. Well, just that your sentiments are exactly what we are trying to push for in the city, and one of the, I think, belief structures that exist right now, not just in D.C. Public Schools, but in public school systems across the country, is this belief that once you have tenure, you have a job for life. And in order to terminate a teacher, you have to show that person has done some incredible malfeasance. And that is because jobs are considered a right. I think we have to change that paradigm so that we begin to think not just do no harm, but that you actually have to show positive progress with your kids to have the privilege of being able to teach them. So we have to move the mind-set to it is a privilege to teach kids, away from you have a right to a job. And that is going to be a long road and it is going to be a hard-fought road to try to change and see that mind-set shift.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much.

My question is to Deputy Mayor Reinoso. I believe that a strategic plan is a necessary map to guide D.C. educational reforms. I understand that one of the office's functions is to align the strategic plans of other D.C. agencies with D.C. education reform goals. However, GAO indicated you could not produce a written strategic plan documenting your role in achieving this alignment.

Do you believe that such documentation is important? Do you plan to produce a written plan?

Mr. REINOSO. Thank you for the question, Senator. As I mentioned in my statement, our emphasis has been on accountability for results and less on collecting plans, which is something that the city was quite successful in doing for many decades, a series of reform plans but no implementation and follow-through in that effort. And so our focus has been to ensure that those on the ground doing the heavy lifting, the DCPS and the State Superintendent Office, as well as the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, that they all develop detailed plans, engage the community in those plans, and then be held accountable for achieving the outcomes that they have laid out as their aspirations in those plans. And in that process, we have sat ensuring that all of those plans are consistent.

I will say that while I have certainly heard the repeated concerns of folks who are looking for a simple, singular document that lays out guideposts that can help someone quickly take a look at the big picture without having to delve down into the details of the individual plans, and we will be, over this next year, working to put together some kind of a document that summarizes at a high level the direction that we are driving towards as a city and including

in that some of the interagency work that we have been engaged in in support of the schools.

I want, though, to continue to caution folks from overemphasizing the importance of those plans. I myself come from the private sector. I have a MBA and have helped launch a number of organizations, businesses, and nonprofits, as well as help turn around underperforming businesses. And what is most important is really the execution plans and not these high-level strategic plans. And, in fact, there is research that suggests that companies that spend too much time refining high-level strategic plans at the expense of measuring and holding managers accountable for actual implementation perform less well than entrepreneurial businesses that may not have these slick, glossy strategic plans.

And so we are trying to bring and maintain that focus on the implementation, but I have heard the repeated requests for some kind of document that can serve as a guidepost, and we will be working on such a document over the coming year.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you. Ms. Briggs, I understand that you need good data to evaluate the effect of initiatives. Thus, the State-wide Longitudinal Education Data system is important to the District's goals of accountability, transparency, and data-driven decisionmaking. I also understand that the development of the SLED system is behind schedule.

Why is this key project delayed and when is it expected to be completed?

Ms. BRIGGS. Thank you for that question, Chairman. It is actually an important tool, for it is the repository for student achievement data that spans not only DCPS but the 90-something charter schools we have in the city as well. And so it is a good source of information as our students do not land in DCPS and maybe stay their entire career, they shift back and forth or start in a charter and end up in DCPS and move around. So this will be a really informative tool for us to make sure that we know how well students are progressing throughout the city.

You are right, it is behind schedule. Some of the original scheduling plans I would say were overly aggressive, and so we are kind of looking at the plans that were put in place and trying to reformulate those to make sure the next plan that comes out for it, we can hit those targets, execute well.

That said, we have done—some aspects of the SLED System are already up and running, and that would be kind of the foundation piece of it, which is the Uniform Student Identifier. So being able to say which student is which student is a really key piece of that, and that part has been launched, and we are working through making sure that data are good and clean and accurate.

So I cannot give you a date yet, but we are working on it.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Reinoso, I understand that your office uses pilot programs to test solutions to problems affecting education results. How are you documenting successes and challenges with these pilot programs? And what accountability measures have you established?

Mr. REINOSO. So with regard to the pilot programs, we have contracted for an independent evaluator that is doing annual reviews of the implementation of those programs, and so that is how we

have this independent external evaluation that is happening. The first evaluation, which only captured a partial year, was positive in its assessment of our progress, but we will continue to look to that external evaluation for an independent assessment of the impact of these programs.

In addition, of course, we will do our own calculations in terms of what impact or effect we can measure resulting from these programs as we work with agencies to determine whether or not to continue these as pilots.

In any kind of investment like this, some projects succeed and others fail. We want to be hard-nosed about admitting which projects have failed and pull funding from those projects. We do not expect to find success in every investment we make, but we do think that on the whole it will allow us to gain momentum in some areas that otherwise we would be unable to gain. And so that is that piece.

Within the greater context of my office, I should say first that I have a very small office in terms of total staff, and then within my office directly each analyst focuses on a cluster of issues, and they prepare through the ePerformance plan, which Ms. Briggs alluded to in her testimony, annual targets, and those targets then roll up to our targets as an office on the whole.

Each year we review those targets as part of the budget-making process and remove metrics that may no longer be relevant, replace them with other metrics as we make progress against certain issues so that we are constantly refreshing those metrics for the office and ensuring that in turn the individual staff's performance plans are aligned with those new metrics. And so that is part of the new fiscal year, so this coming fiscal year we will have a new set of metrics as well as refreshed individual staff level performance plans that align with those metrics.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much. Senator Voinovich.

Senator VOINOVICH. The District's dropout rate is less than 50 percent, and it is a tragedy in the country that 50 percent of the kids in the urban districts are dropping out of school.

We have talked about teachers and what you are trying to do there, if I heard your testimony right. How many principals have you changed since 2007?

Ms. RHEE. In the last school year, we changed about 49 of the principals in the District. This year, though we do not have a final count, it will probably be somewhere between 22 and 28.

Senator VOINOVICH. How many schools do you have?

Ms. RHEE. We have 123 schools.

Senator VOINOVICH. So you have really done some changing. I know when we talked several years ago about how to help the District, and the private sector. Have you increased the pay for the principals so that you could attract better people? Or how has that worked?

Ms. RHEE. We are currently negotiating a new contract with the principals union, and what we are hoping at this point we can include is, obviously, a significant salary bump, but also a significant pay-for-performance structure as well.

Senator VOINOVICH. So you have more flexibility with the principals union than you do with the other union?

Ms. RHEE. We will come to a resolution on the contract with the principals union in a much——

Senator VOINOVICH. But you have been able to move people around, which is——

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator VOINOVICH. But you have had to move them from other places. In other words, you moved them to some other school.

Ms. RHEE. No.

Senator VOINOVICH. What happened to them? Did they go back in the classroom or something?

Ms. RHEE. The principals are on a different contract, and if we find a principal is not meeting expectations, then we can remove them from the District. Some of our principals, have retreat rights and that sort of thing. But we have been successful, I think, in ensuring that for those principals who are not meeting expectations, they are not being moved to other schools in that position.

Senator VOINOVICH. What happens to them?

Ms. RHEE. I think it depends. The vast majority of them have left the school district.

Senator VOINOVICH. Next, parents. I know that the College Access Program (CAP) program has got counselors in the schools. Tell us a little bit about CAP and the Gates Foundation and how they are helping in terms of this dropout rate, because the real issue here is the intervention early enough to identify where the kid is and spend time with the parent or whoever is taking care of it. Can you tell us a little bit about what are you doing with these private sector dollars to help deal with the dropout rate? Or are those dollars spent on something else?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. So I will give you a little context on this, but I do want to sort of point out the fact that this initiative was well underway by the time I got here, so it is something that the community had for a long time seen as a significant need.

One of the statistics that was driving that reform effort was the fact that they found that of the ninth graders who begin high school in D.C. public schools, only 9 percent of them graduate from college within 5 years. And I think that across the city, overall, there was just this huge outcry, saying, “What is happening to our kids? Why aren’t more of them heading towards college? What are the barriers? And then how do we collectively as a city commit to significantly changing that circumstance?”

To that end, a number of things happened. The D.C. TAG program is certainly one that provides more affordable college tuition to D.C. residents. There are several scholarship programs.

Senator VOINOVICH. The D.C. CAP is \$2,500 for eligible kids? Is that it, over and above TAG?

Ms. RHEE. So there are several different programs. There is the D.C. CAP program. There are also other scholarship programs that provide up to \$2,500 per year for a student’s tuition. So there are actually multiple opportunities for D.C. public school kids to be able to access additional dollars. That was one piece of it, and the Gates Foundation was a big supporter of making sure that those scholarship dollars were there so that finances were not the prohibiting factor for our kids going to school.

Another component——



Senator VOINOVICH. They have allocated, what, \$125 million over 10 years?

Ms. RHEE. Over \$100 million, correct.

The other component of the program, though, that they saw was necessary was not just to provide scholarships once students were able to gain entrance into college, but good college counseling so that children understood beginning from their freshman year what were the necessary steps that would have to be taken in order to gain entry into a 4-year college. So part of the D.C. CAP program actually puts college counselors in every single one of our high schools who work individually with children and families to make sure that all the proper tests are taken, that the applications are filled out, that the financial aid forms are submitted, and then people get training in that over the course of their 4-year career in our high schools.

Senator VOINOVICH. And that has had a real effect? In other words, the parents have been brought in and they talk about it, and so that the youngster has an opportunity to know that if they do well in school and stay in school that they can go on to college if they work hard.

Ms. RHEE. Absolutely. I think if you go out to any of our high schools and talk to the students, they will all tell you that they know exactly who the D.C. CAP counselor is, that those people are incredibly proactive in terms of, getting them out of the hallway, bringing them into their offices, and making sure that they are very much staying on top of everything that they need to do to be able to put themselves in a position where they could apply to and be accepted into a 4-year college.

Senator VOINOVICH. I think many recall the *Washington Post* investigative report on the infrastructure of the District schools. What plans are in place to make the improvements? And how is the \$148 million in stimulus money going to be utilized as part of this whole program? And, by the way, does the \$148 million go to the Superintendent and then you divvy it up? Why don't you tell me about that.

Ms. RHEE. So you mentioned earlier the initiative that Ohio took on. I was living in Toledo at the time, and I can attest to the fact that when the State made that commitment, it really set a precedent across, citizens everywhere saying, OK, we know now that we are prioritizing education in a different way by the State taking the lead on this. And I think that the Mayor has worked with the council to ensure that the same kind of initiative is being taken through our Master Facility Plan.

We inherited a Master Facility Plan that had the modernization and renovations of all of the District schools spread out over an extraordinarily long period of time, and so there were some schools that were not going to be able to be modernized until, 14, 15, 16 years out.

What the Mayor did, I think very smartly, in creating the new governance legislation was to create the Office of Public Education Facility Management and to hire somebody who is a facilities guy to lead that department. It has been absolutely astonishing. I think if you ask any resident of D.C. to quantify it, qualitatively tell you the difference in the momentum that has been seen over the last

2 years in overhauling the infrastructure and the facilities in the District, it has been significant.

What Alan Lew has done is to collapse the plan into a 5-year plan because what we do not want to do is have families waiting forever to see their schools modernized. So over a 5-year period, we will ensure that every school in the District is modernized and renovated to meet our quality standards, and that modernization and renovation will start with what we call Phase I modernization, which is making sure that the classroom in every single school, which is where the children spend the vast majority of their time, are brought up to code, where we do not have to worry about air conditioning and heating issues and that sort of thing. And he has made a tremendous amount of progress. I will let the State Superintendent talk a little bit about the stimulus funds.

Ms. BRIGGS. So the three main pieces—there are a number of programs that come through the stimulus, but the three big ones are—there is the Title I formula and then the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part B for special education. Both of those are formula grants that we have received at the State agency and have distributed the preliminary allocations to not only DCPS but our other 57 charter school districts. And so they have the initial sort of numbers that they will get for that.

And then with the State fiscal fund, we are the fiscal agent for this program, which is essentially under the governor. Our Mayor gets to distribute. Most of those funds are going to also be going to schools through the elementary—variously through the student funding formula or through the Title I formula.

The Office of the State Superintendent is going to be having a summit essentially later in the summer

Senator VOINOVICH. Let me just ask you this because I am running out of time, and I will try to make it quicker. The \$148 million, that is money for shovel-ready improvements in the classroom and you are folding it in on top of this master plan that Mr. Lew is doing? How is that working?

Ms. BRIGGS. These funds are actually not for capital improvements. They are going to be—I think most districts will probably choose to use them for instructional and capacity-building efforts. That said, they do have that option—the charter schools do, anyway, and I do not think DCPS is going to be using—

Senator VOINOVICH. OK. So the 140 is not for infrastructure. It is for other programs that the district will decide on what they want to do with it.

Ms. BRIGGS. Yes, and some of them could choose to use them that way, but I do not think we know that yet.

Senator VOINOVICH. Senator Akaka, thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Voinovich. Senator Burris.

Senator BURRIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Rhee, do you have a contract or do you serve at the Mayor's pleasure?

Ms. RHEE. I serve at the pleasure of the Mayor.

Senator BURRIS. OK. So you do not have a contract.

Ms. RHEE. Well, I do have a contract, but in the contract it says that I serve at the pleasure of the Mayor.

Senator BURRIS. OK. That is interesting. And who has the responsibility of certifying teachers in the District?

Ms. RHEE. Teacher certification happens through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

Senator BURRIS. That is you, Ms. Briggs?

Ms. BRIGGS. Yes. But that effort only applies to the DCPS teachers. Charter school teachers do not have to have the certification in the same way that the DCPS teachers do.

Senator BURRIS. Charter teachers are not certified—who certified charter teachers?

Ms. BRIGGS. They are not required to be certified in the same way that—

Senator BURRIS. Same way? How are they certified?

Ms. BRIGGS. They do not have to have a State certification.

Senator BURRIS. Well, thank you. That was easy to say. They do not have a State—can you say that? They are not certified.

Ms. BRIGGS. I am sure some of them are, but they are not required to be certified.

Senator BURRIS. They are not required to be certified. OK. Now, who does a principal of a school report to?

Ms. RHEE. The principals of our schools report to the instructional superintendents. We have six instructional superintendents in the District.

Senator BURRIS. And they report to you?

Ms. RHEE. The instructional superintendents report to the Chief Academic Officer.

Senator BURRIS. And who has to sign off on the firing of a teacher?

Ms. RHEE. When a teacher is terminated, there are multiple parties that are involved: The principal, the instructional superintendent, and also central office human resources (HR) staff.

Senator BURRIS. So the instructional superintendent is also responsible for the curriculum for the students? Who is responsible for the curriculum that goes into the classroom?

Ms. RHEE. The Teaching and Learning Department is the department that oversees approving certain curricula standards, pacing guides, etc., to ensure that those are being executed at the school level.

Senator BURRIS. And do you all have in your classrooms anything classified as a teacher's aide or is it just a teacher in the classroom?

Ms. RHEE. We do have paraprofessionals, yes.

Senator BURRIS. Paraprofessionals. And what are their responsibilities?

Ms. RHEE. It depends. A large number of our paraprofessionals are dedicated aides who are assigned to help our special education students. The other place where we have a large number of paraprofessionals is in our early grades, in our pre-K and K classrooms.

Senator BURRIS. And you are in the process now of negotiating your union contract, I understand—

Ms. RHEE. With the teachers?

Senator BURRIS. Yes, with the teachers.

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator BURRIS. That my former law school dean, Kurt Schmoke, is in the process of mediating this?

Ms. RHEE. Yes, he is.

Senator BURRIS. Well, you all have a great mediator.

Ms. RHEE. Yes, we do.

Senator BURRIS. I do not know how the problem is going to come out, but that is certainly a great dean of my law school.

Now, under this new structure, D.C. Public School system has been placed under for 2 years now—right? You got it together.

Ms. RHEE. Right.

Senator BURRIS. How does the new structure enable the D.C. Public Schools to make improvements that have been done so far? What improvements can you say that you have been able to do in a very short process so far, improvements in your system? And how accurate was the GAO report in assessing the progress made by the schools so far? How accurate was that report?

Ms. RHEE. So it is interesting. In your earlier round of questioning, you were saying there is so much bureaucracy, and though I completely understand that point of view, I would say that there is less bureaucracy now than there used to be.

Senator BURRIS. There is less under this system—

Ms. RHEE. That is right.

Senator BURRIS [continuing]. Than there was under the old system?

Ms. RHEE. Yes.

Senator BURRIS. OK, which means that is the reason why it was really a mess.

Ms. RHEE. Well, we still certainly have our challenges and will continue to look at how we can streamline structure. We do believe that we are in a much better position now and that there is less bureaucracy now. And because I am able to report directly to the Mayor—and the Mayor meets with the education-related principals, so the three of us and Director Lew, who oversees the Public Education Facilities and Modernization Department, we are very much aligned in what we do. And so this structure allows us to move in a much more aggressive and agile way, I think, than the District was able to do—

Senator BURRIS. So how accurate was the GAO report?

Ms. RHEE. In terms of the accuracy of the GAO report, I certainly think that on some measures they were absolutely correct in outlining some of the significant accomplishments we have made, and also identifying some of the things that we should continue to work on.

We just today had access to the final report, so I have not been able to look at that. But in looking at some of the documents that I see, I do think that there are some inaccuracies in the report. And my understanding is that we will have the chance to respond to the report and that we will have our response go on record. And so I think it will be important for us to clarify some of those things.

Senator BURRIS. And so what are some of the initiatives now that you are looking at that you would like to tell us in a very short period of time that you plan to try to implement to improve that situation? What are some of your initiatives that you have on the drawing board that you hope to initiate?

Ms. RHEE. Some of them we have talked about, such as the instructional coaches. I would say another—

Senator BURRIS. That is what I want to get back to. You mean instructional coaches for teachers.

Ms. RHEE. Correct. We have instructional coaches, full-time instructional coaches in every single building whose responsibility it is to professionally develop the teachers in that building.

Senator BURRIS. OK. That goes back to my question about the qualifications of teachers and who certifies teachers. So you are hiring teachers that once you hire them, they are going to have to be taught how to teach. Is that what you are saying?

Ms. RHEE. No, but any professional, regardless of what career you are in, just because you are in that role does not mean you cannot grow your skills and your knowledge. Every professional wants to continue to improve as they are in their role, and that is the same expectation that we have of teachers. The minute they walk in the classroom, though you may be certified, you have a continuous cycle of improvement and professional development that you want to go through. And so we have instructional coaches at every school to ensure that particularly focused on new and struggling teachers, that we can continue to build their skills and knowledge base.

Senator BURRIS. Mr. Chairman, I see my time is up. I do not know whether or not there is going to be a third round. Well, let me ask this last question.

Now, if I brought all of today's witnesses back to this table 2 years from now, how would the assessment differ from what we are hearing today?

Ms. RHEE. Well, I believe that 2 years from now we will be able to show even increased results that are building on the first 2 years that we have seen. And I think the reform efforts and the initiatives will have gone deeper into the system. So over the first 2 years, we would focus a lot on the systemic issues and the operational issues that we are stopping schools from getting the resources that they needed to be effective. And I think that what you will see over the next 2 years is that those reforms are much more at the classroom level with our new Teaching and Learning Framework, with the new teacher evaluation tool, with the new academic interventions that we are putting in place for struggling students.

Senator BURRIS. I would hope that you would say you hope to see that the students have highly improved.

Ms. RHEE. That is what I started with saying, that you would see significant—

Senator BURRIS. Well, I did not hear that. We want to see that the students come out of the public schools in the District of Columbia 2 years from now are highly improved based on the teachers that you have hired and this bureaucracy that has been created. Is that what you want to see 2 years from now?

Ms. RHEE. Absolutely.

Senator BURRIS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Senator Burriss.

I have a question for Ms. Ashby. Your report emphasized the importance of strategic plans and linking them to performance. As

you heard, I asked the Deputy Mayor about strategic planning. Do you agree with Mr. Reinoso's response about strategic plans?

Ms. ASHBY. Well, things have certainly come a long ways since I last testified before this Subcommittee in March 2008. Now there is what we will call a statewide plan—recognizing that the District of Columbia is not a State, but there is a districtwide strategic plan, and it does have various components, but you do have to work a bit to figure out just what it is. But it does exist.

The point we made in the report with regard to alignment has to do with the fact that we were told that the DCPS and the State Superintendent's plans are aligned, and we asked for documentation to support that, and that is the documentation we did not get.

In your response, Mr. Reinoso, however, although you have a strategic plan, I am hearing some of the same rhetoric I did hear in March 2008 that downplays the importance of strategic planning, and the belief that if you have a plan, it just sits on the shelf, or if you have a plan, you are not doing other things, and that what we are doing is just talking about a plan for the sake of having a plan. And as I said in March 2008, that is not the case. A plan is a useful tool if used properly; if developed and used properly.

For example, it is a tool for communicating with stakeholders, and we made that point in our current report, as we did almost 18 months ago, that it is important to have stakeholders involved early in making key decisions and in developing key initiatives.

One way of doing that is having the overall plan available so that people who are interested in knowing what is going to happen, know what is coming up. You need outreach to the community. But you also need to have structures in place that ensure you are going to incorporate stakeholders. Regardless of time constraints or whatever else, you have things in place, structures in place that make sure you do certain things.

And I will bring this around to the comment—not directly answering your question, Mr. Chairman, but there have been a couple of references stating that there are inaccuracies or tone problems in our report. Within GAO, we have many structures that ensure that our reports are balanced, that they are objective, that they are based on data. I am proud to say that I stand behind this report and every report I have been involved in at GAO.

In order to be balanced, there is going to be some negative along with the positive. We think that a lot of things have been accomplished. We think that there have been improvements in the D.C. public schools. We know there is a lot to be done, as has been recognized here. But there are also areas where there were some false steps. And I think if you look overall at our recommendations about stakeholders, strategic planning, you will see that they are linked.

Some of the false steps came about because the constituents involved were not asked to provide input early on, and then later on down the road, things did not go well, and then their views might have been taken into consideration.

So in terms of our work—and you know this, Mr. Chairman, that generally I do not need to defend our work, but since I have not said anything, I have not been asked anything today, and there

have been a couple of comments about our report, I thought I needed to say that.

It is real important that stakeholders be involved, that there be strategic plans, there be a road map, and that the various tools be implemented. Thank you.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you very much for that. I was also interested in knowing whether you had any recommendations about what DCPS can do to make it easier for all stakeholders to evaluate the District's progress on education reform.

Ms. ASHBY. Well, in terms of evaluating progress, it is going to take time. There have been improvements in standardized test scores, as has been discussed here. But it is difficult to link certainly any particular initiative or any group of initiatives to that improvement. That is not to say that some of those initiatives have not been somewhat responsible for some of the improvement. So that part is difficult. But you have to have transparency and openness. Those elements are part of accountability. You cannot be accountable if people do not know what you are doing or what you are supposed to be doing. So that is one way that the constituents in the District of Columbia can be more assured that things are going right and the best things are being done and progress is being made.

Senator AKAKA. Well, thank you very much for your responses.

I have a final question for our District witnesses on the panel. We are not far from the start of the 2009–2010 school year. We are looking forward to that, especially because so many things have happened in the past 2 years. Without question, you have made progress, but we know that there are so many other difficult issues that we need to deal with here. What are your top three priorities as we move forward in this whole effort? Chancellor Rhee, would you please begin?

Ms. RHEE. Sure. The first priority that the District has is a successful rollout of the new Teaching and Learning Framework, as I mentioned before. This framework will be introduced this summer. The teachers will be trained on it ongoing through the course of this year, and we think it will have a substantial impact overall in terms of our student achievement levels.

The second priority is the implementation, the effective implementation of our new teacher evaluation model. It is something that teachers have long been clamoring for the improvement of, and I think we have made some significant modifications that are going to improve that greatly.

The third, I would say, is the focus on building our school portfolio so that we have programs and initiatives happening in our public school buildings, which are on par with things that are compelling in private and charter schools across the city. And we are doing that through increases in dual language immersion programs and arts integration programs and STEM programs, which is science, technology, engineering, and math. So we are excited about that, and a move more towards some of our higher-performing schools, having increased autonomy which would mirror the autonomy that some of our charter schools have.

I also want to make a final statement. Some of the questions that I got today from Senators focused a lot on poor-performing

teachers, and I certainly wanted to address those questions, but I would be remiss if I did not talk about the thousands of teachers in the District who are doing heroic work for our children every day. And I think that it is important not to paint a picture where we do not believe that incredibly hard work is happening. Our teachers have worked unbelievably hard over the last 2 years. The gains that we have seen with students would not have been possible without their dedication and commitment. Many of them are working in circumstances that are incredibly challenging and difficult with a lack of resources for many of them. Lots of them serve as the only positive adult role model that some of our children see every day. And so I want to make sure that we recognize those teachers and the work that they do as well.

Senator AKAKA. Mr. Reinoso.

Mr. REINOSO. Thank you, Senator. Obviously, our overarching goal is continued improvement in student achievement. From where I sit, there are some key levers that we hope to make progress on in the coming year. We would like to see even better, tighter coordination between the agencies that support youth and families around education issues.

One of the measures there will be the successful completion of some of our pilot programs and the assumption of those responsibilities moving forward through new home agencies.

The State office reports through me, and the highest priority there is that we continue reform efforts so that we can be removed from our high-risk designation.

Then the other education agency that reports through me is the facilities, and we hope to see that we stay on track and, where possible, exceed our expectations for modernizing classrooms so that we stay on pace and can provide the kind of quality learning environments that we need in order to educate our children and provide the best opportunities for our teachers to achieve all that they are capable of.

Senator VOINOVICH [presiding]. Senator Akaka has to go to the floor, so I am going to ask a few more questions and give Senator Burris a chance to ask some, and then we will wrap it up.

One of the things that many of the most up-to-date school systems are doing is the use of technology, and computers. What are you doing to make sure that the students are computer literate? And are you using technology to help a teacher educate children? I know when I was governor, we wired every classroom in the State for voice, video, and data, and realized that if the kids are not computer literate, they are gone.

What are you doing in that regard and where do you stand?

Ms. RHEE. One of the best examples of having the Deputy Mayor's office coordinating amongst agencies has benefited the District of Columbia public schools. The Deputy Mayor's office has ensured that what we call the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), of the city, has taken a significant role in ensuring that we are technologically up-to-date in our schools. We have actually outsourced our technology, in essence, to OCTO, and they have done everything from ensuring that schools are wired, that we are ordering the appropriate materials so that we have computers in every classroom. We had a significant rollout of computers last



year to ensure that every teacher had access to a computer, and now we are actually doing that for computer labs in classrooms across the District.

Senator VOINOVICH. What are you doing for the teachers?

Ms. RHEE. There are a few things that we are doing for teachers. First of all, we are trying to enable them to make their jobs easier in some ways through technology, which means that some of the things that teachers used to have to do by hand in terms of attendance and grades and that sort of thing, we are putting those things online.

We also have had a number of courses for teachers to ensure that they can become more technologically savvy and computer literate so that they can work to ensure that they are integrating technology within their teaching repertoire.

We have a number of teachers right now who are piloting the use of smart boards in their classrooms, and that has been a pretty significant effort in a number of our schools.

You asked about how we are doing, how we are using technology to increase student learning as well. One of the major efforts that we have taken on is ensuring that for our children, our high school children who were not on track to graduate, that we had aggressive credit recovery options for them, so that even if they have not received the credits that they need so far, that they can actually still graduate on time, and much of that is being done through online courses.

Senator VOINOVICH. So you are on your way with that.

Ms. RHEE. We are on our way. We are still not anywhere close to where we need to be. Because so many of our facilities are not up to par in terms of their electrical systems and that sort of thing, we are not able to bring the technological resources into every one of our schools that we would like. But as Director Lew moves through the Master Facility Plan over the next 5 years, the technology component is a significant part of that.

Senator VOINOVICH. One of these days I would like to come out and visit a couple of your schools. I have not done that yet.

Ms. RHEE. We would love to have you come out.

Senator VOINOVICH. The issue of the cost per pupil education, \$15,000, and there are always a lot of comments about it is the most expensive and ranked very low at the bottom, second from the bottom. Have you published a reason why your costs are so much higher than some other places?

Ms. RHEE. Well, it certainly is true that if you look at our overall costs across the city in terms of public education and the number of students that we have, we rank up there in terms of per pupil expenditures. I think a number of things drive that.

One of the reasons that is pretty widely known is the problems that we faced in special education. We spend more than \$75 million a year on the transportation of a few thousand special education children in the system. We spend over \$150 million a year on tuition to non-public placements for special education students because we cannot serve them well within the traditional public schools.

So a lot of these are some of the factors that drive up our cost.

Senator VOINOVICH. In other words, these are special things that you have got costs, but relatively speaking, I would think that a lot of other districts, urban districts, would have the same problems.

Ms. RHEE. Well, I would say that our problems are out of whack, and that is part of the issue. In most high-functioning districts, only 2 percent of the special education population actually go to non-public placements. For us, it is a much more significant number. We have more due process hearings in the District of Columbia than in all of the other States combined, so that gives you a sense—

Senator VOINOVICH. Why is that?

Ms. RHEE. I will be honest in saying that historically it has been the complete and utter dysfunction of the District's Special Education Department, and so we are in the midst of fixing that. I will say that over the past year we have made much more significant progress than the District has ever seen before. We inherited a backlog of several thousand overdue hearing officer decisions. We have brought that down almost to the single digits over the course of the past year, and we have many fewer complaints and hearing officer decisions being rendered over the last year than the District has seen in a long time.

So we are heading in the right direction, but we still cannot say that we believe every dollar that is being spent in the District on public education is being utilized in the most efficient way. I think we have a plan for how we are going to make sure over time that happens. But we still have a number of places in which we can point very specifically to inefficiencies and to expenditures that are not serving the overall good of the kids.

Senator VOINOVICH. I would suggest just for the record, because it constantly comes up, that you put something out and get it to the Members of Congress and say, this is what it is and here is why, it is where it is, and we are trying to work on some of these things, because the impression is that, it is just, well, that is the way it is, it is Washington. And I think that would be very helpful to you.

The other thing is that it was reported that the charter schools—it was on my birthday. They missed a \$103 million payment due to its 60 charter schools. That was in the *Washington Post*. Is that an indication that you have got problems with your financial management system? Or what caused that?

Mr. REINOSO. The issue there was that because the budget was out—not balanced due to that we are in the middle of resubmitting a budget aligned with the latest revenue projections, the city was unable to draw down all of the funds immediately. And so a request went out initially in coordination with the Public Charter Board to do \$57 million of the \$100-plus million at once, and that money has gone out and allocated per the Charter Board's decisions first to the weakest, those in the most precarious financial situation.

We did submit a request to draw down the additional funds, and that will be out to the schools shortly. So all of the funding will be in place, again, a little bit behind schedule, but in time to avert any kind of crisis for their management.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, I am sure that some of the people that were relying on the check maybe had a little crisis. But the bottom line is that you are saying to me that it is not the system, it was a question of the dollars were not there, and that is what delayed the——

Mr. REINOSO. It was a question of whether the city could move forward with an allocation without a balanced budget in place, and because we were caught in the middle of having submitted a budget that was balanced, but then having received from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer figures that suggested that the city's budget was no longer in balance, and then given that situation, could the city or should the city do the payment all at once or in two tranches. And so we have now put everyone in place to move out the entire funding to the schools.

Senator VOINOVICH. My concern was it is that, not a screw-up in the——

Mr. REINOSO. No. That is right.

Senator VOINOVICH [continuing]. Financial system.

Mr. REINOSO. No.

Senator VOINOVICH. One of the areas that I am very concerned about—and, again, it gets back to my days when I was governor—is early childhood education, and I would be interested in knowing what is the District doing in that regard. And are you using any of your Title I money for early childhood education, or is it all going from K-12?

Ms. BRIGGS. One of the initiatives that the city has undergoing that is actually pretty exciting is the pre-K effort, and it funds not only pre-K classrooms in DCPS but also in charter schools and in community-based organizations. Last year, I believe there were around 23, 24 classrooms that were supported in this way, and we are hoping to expand that in the next year moving forward.

Senator VOINOVICH. Does the District provide—and I should know this, and I do not—full-day kindergarten?

Mr. REINOSO. Yes.

Ms. RHEE. Yes, we do.

Senator VOINOVICH. And how about pre-school? What percentage of the kids have an opportunity for pre-school?

Ms. BRIGGS. I do not know that number offhand, but we have done a capacity audit and also a quality assessment of our pre-K programs, I do not know. We can get that for you.

Senator VOINOVICH. How about Head Start? Where are you in terms of your Head Start program? And is the District spending any money on Head Start, or is it all Federal money?

Ms. BRIGGS. We spend mostly Federal money—it is not——

Mr. REINOSO. There is a local match.

Ms. BRIGGS. There is a local match. Both Federal and local money on Head Start.

Senator VOINOVICH. How many students do you have in the Head Start program?

Ms. BRIGGS. I do not know that number off the top of my head. We can get it for you.

Senator VOINOVICH. I would like to know what the percentage is.

Ms. BRIGGS. Sure.

Senator VOINOVICH. I think one of the areas that we really are failing in—and the Title I money, are you using any of that Title I money for pre-school?

Ms. BRIGGS. Schools can use their Title I money to support pre-K and early childhood efforts.

Senator VOINOVICH. OK. I would like a report on what you are doing in terms of early childhood, where you stand in terms of your Head Start program.

Ms. BRIGGS. Yes.<sup>1</sup>

[The information follows:]

Senator VOINOVICH. As I say, Ms. Rhee, I tell some of the superintendents that by the time the kids get to Title I, it is too late for them. While I was Chairman of the National Governors Association, we had a big effort on early childhood education, and the word was getting out if the kids do not get that kind of support early in life.

Ms. RHEE. It is.

Senator VOINOVICH. And I would say to the superintendents, you can use Title I money for pre-school. They said, Well, I got to have the money from Title I because that is the way I help subsidize the other money that I have in the system, and that is what we are using it for.

Ms. RHEE. We have significantly increased the number of pre-K seats that are available to families for this coming school year, and I will also add that we are using some of our IDEA additional dollars towards an early childhood assessment center that will be put in place to be able to identify children at 2 and 3 years old who have special needs so that we can begin services early and that they are not waiting until they come into kindergarten to get those, so that we can ensure that they are as ready for school as possible.

Senator VOINOVICH. Well, that is going to be interesting because I know when the stimulus package came along, I did not vote for it, but I did feel that we did have a Federal responsibility in IDEA. We have increased it dramatically since I have been in the Senate, since 1999, but it is still inadequate. And I think it is real important now that we have increased it, they all get together with others and say, you got it up here, do not cut it back on us because I think that is something that is legitimate. It has been an unfunded mandate and something that you can argue and say that you definitely—it is a Federal responsibility and one that we should meet.

Ms. RHEE. Absolutely.

Senator VOINOVICH. I just want to thank you all for being here today, and on orders of the Chairman, the meeting is adjourned.

Mr. REINOSO. Thank you.

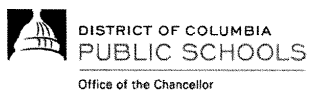
Senator VOINOVICH. And, by the way, the record will be open for a week so you may be getting additional questions from me, Senator Akaka, and maybe from some other Members of this Subcommittee.

[Whereupon, at 4:55 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

<sup>1</sup>The get-backs from Ms. Briggs appears in the Appendix on page 151.

# APPENDIX

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Testimony of Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

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

The Honorable Daniel Akaka, Chairman  
The Honorable George Voinovich, Ranking Member

"Education Reform in the District of Columbia"

July 23, 2009

Good afternoon, Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and members of the Committee. I am honored to testify today about education reform in the District of Columbia Public Schools and the findings of the GAO report.

In our nation's capital, our education system can and should be a source of national pride. We know from the significant progress students have made in the last two years in DC—and from the results from high performing urban schools—that in good schools children of all backgrounds and circumstances can gain the skills that will allow them positive and fulfilling life choices. Urban schools can send their children to college at rates that can compete with suburban schools.

We also know how much work it will take to get there. Despite the progress of the past two years, the situation remains dire when less than half of our students can read, write and do math at grade level. When Mayor Fenty gave me the privilege of reforming the school system to achieve this goal with him, we quickly discovered a few of the ways that schools were not supported to educate their students competitively.

For example, in 2007 brand new textbooks sat unopened in warehouses while students sat in history classes with books that ended with Nixon's presidency. The school system, owing money to teachers who had worked here years ago, at the same time was accidentally mailing checks to former employees who hadn't worked here for years—even when the employees were regularly calling to correct the problem. While one DCPS school showed 9% of its students were on grade level in math, a successful charter school a few blocks away showed 91% of its students were on grade level.

Parents responded, and between 1996 and 2007 the enrollment of the public school system dropped by 40% as families without viable options in their

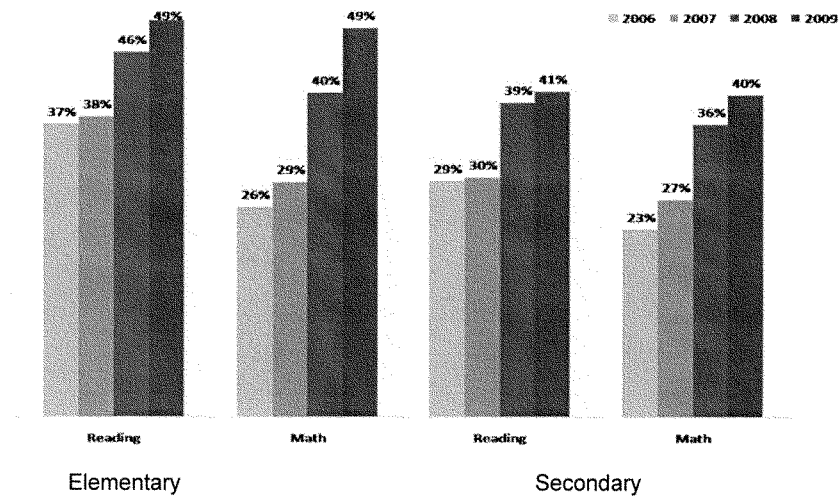
neighborhoods sought schools that would serve their children according to their rights and abilities.

Because of the sheer size of the problem, many thought it would be near impossible to resuscitate DCPS, never mind take student achievement beyond the high expectations we have for children in our country's top schools. However, after decades of poor achievement, under the leadership of Mayor Adrian Fenty we are applying the innovative solutions and commonsense practices that are beginning to turn the tide.

For the second year in a row, DCPS students have posted significant gains on our annual standardized test, the DC CAS. Second year gains are more unusual than a first-year rise in scores, and we are pleased that in 2009 our principals and teachers brought gains across all grade levels and in both reading and math.

Good News: DC CAS Gains in 2009

Our elementary students made significant gains in math and reading this year, moving from 40% proficient in math last year to 49% this year, and from 46% proficient in reading to 49% this year—on top of the encouraging gains achieved in Year One. Our secondary students showed improvement as well this year, advancing from 39 to 41% proficient in reading and 36 to 40% proficient in math.



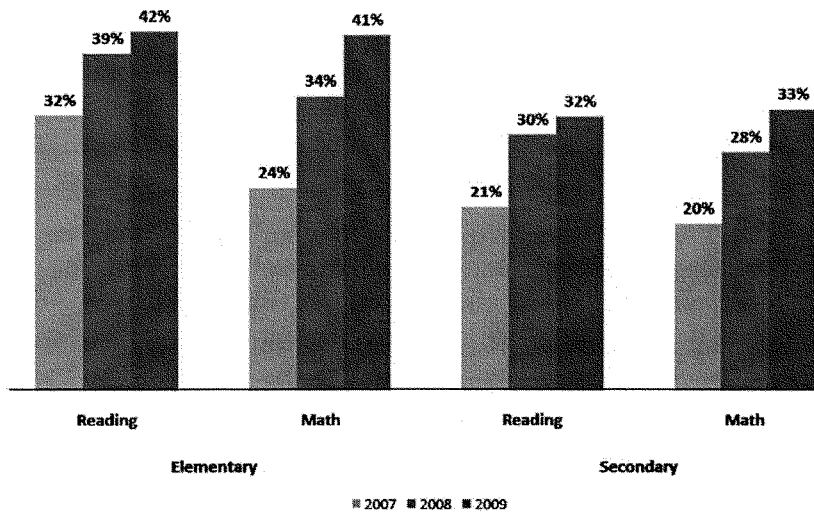


Gains Among Subgroups

I have heard from many who argue that economically disadvantaged students are not as capable of learning as students from more affluent families are, and that it is only “realistic” to assume that neighborhoods dominated by poor and minority students will remain caught in the cycles of poverty we see now. I am happy to see that our students have an answer for that.

In just two years in secondary math, students have narrowed the achievement gap by 20 percentage points, from 70% to 50%. The gap has narrowed across all grade levels and subject areas, and our students have made it clear that they intend to keep going. In fact, virtually every subgroup of students increased proficiency rates this year, including our students with special education needs, our English Language Learners (ELLs), and our Economically Disadvantaged students. ELL students are outperforming the district as a whole in elementary reading, elementary math, and secondary math, with 20% gains in secondary reading over two years.

**DCPS Economically Disadvantaged Student Proficiency**



Two years ago, when Mayor Fenty took over the schools, only one-third of our students were on grade level in reading and math. Two years later, almost half of our students are on grade level in reading and math. Of course, the fact that only half our students are proficient is not cause for celebration. But given where we once were, this is evidence of progress and a cause for hope.

#### The GAO Report

The GAO report released last month represents the conclusion of nearly two years of ongoing evaluation and analysis. Overall, we agreed with many of the major recommendations from the draft report, though we have not seen the final report. As we have shared with the GAO team, the mayor will continue to make constant evaluation and stakeholder input central and integral components of ensuring accountability under the governance structure.

We were perplexed, however, by the tone and specific conclusions of the GAO report. We believe the report fell short of objectively conveying the context for the DCPS initiatives underway and of adequately capturing all of the progress that has been made to date. I would like to use my remaining time to explain some of the innovative reforms occurring at DCPS that have allowed us to make the gains we have seen in student achievement.

#### Human Capital Initiatives

The rise in academic achievement over the past two years is in large part the result of months of hard work and dedication from our teachers and principals, and we still have a long way to go. There is no way to get around it—without high quality teachers and principals at every DCPS school, the achievement gap will not close and performance will not rise. We *must* support a teaching corps that is focused on student achievement, and we must recognize and reward them when they accomplish the enormous gains we are asking them to reach with students.

For many years, new teachers have struggled to “reinvent the wheel” of classroom management and planning without significant or sustained support from DCPS. But just as teachers are asked to meet every individual child’s academic needs, professional development must support teachers at all ends of the spectrum on their way toward mastery. DCPS has established a higher commitment to professional development with a 400% increase in budgeted PD resources. This has allowed us to hire teacher coaches to support reading and math instruction. The coaches work at the school level, getting to know teachers and their styles and practice to help new and struggling teachers advance their students’ academic growth.

Building teacher capacity for excellence is the most important work of the past two years and the years to come. Nothing is more telling of this importance than the way students flock to our best teachers. In one of our high schools last year, a teacher was surprised to find students attending her class who were not on her roster. When she asked them why they were there, they said that they were learning from her, and they wanted to attend her class whether they were getting credit for it or not.

Schools also need strong principals to succeed. In a district facing a challenge of this size, we need the best school leaders we can find, and we must support those we have to achieve according to their highest potential. As part of our aggressive human capital strategy, DCPS recruited over 49 proven instructional leaders for the 2008-2009 school year to replace principals who were unable to increase student performance. Our new principals went on to outperform the district-wide averages on the DC-CAS this year. One of these new principals, Dwan Jordon, assumed leadership last year of Sousa Middle School in Ward 7, one of the city’s highest poverty wards. In just one year he galvanized his staff to move students up 17% points in reading and 25% in math, meeting AYP for the first time in Sousa’s history.

When we hire, or develop staff to achieve such results, our children cannot afford to lose them. To attract and retain highly effective staff we must dramatically change the way in which teachers and principals are compensated. Already, DCPS has provided incentives to teachers who helped their students realize school-wide gains of 20 points or greater in both math and reading. After the 2007-2008 school year, DCPS awarded cash bonuses to the staff at 7 schools. Teachers at these schools each received an \$8,000 cash award, sending a clear message that if they perform at the highest level, they will be rewarded.

#### Engaging Families and Community Stakeholders

We are proud of what we have accomplished in the past two years, but we have not created these results on our own. In addition to significant support from multiple city agencies under the mayor, a proactive community including students, parents, families, community advocates and countless stakeholders has engaged in reform with us.

Here at DCPS, we have modeled ourselves on Mayor Fenty's commitment to community responsiveness, adopting the city's customer service standards under his directive. This year alone our Critical Response Team received, responded to, and resolved more than 16,000 issues, complaints, and inquiries from parents, teachers and community members. We have also taken great efforts to be present in the schools and communities we serve. This past school year, I met informally with hundreds of DCPS teachers to hear their needs and concerns.

We also sponsored community engagement opportunities continuously throughout the past year. These events included everything from intimate living room sessions to city-wide meetings where policy proposals were discussed.

In fact, any time one of our DCPS departments presents a major project or policy change, the department works with our Office of Family and Public Engagement to ensure that institutional and community stakeholders have a chance to weigh in on the proposed changes. One example that shows how this process works is the community engagement that occurred over one year to revise our student discipline policy.

With much input from students, families and school staff, in our first year we learned of many ways that the policy was detrimental to student achievement. We then created a task force to revamp the policy with the help and significant efforts of the DC community. This task force went out to schools to speak with students, created focus groups of teachers, principals, parents, and community advocates, and listened. With the input from the focus groups, we created a draft of a new policy to bring to the larger DC community. Then, through a series of three community meetings held in different wards this past winter, we presented the draft to the community and hosted multiple discussions to garner as much input and experience possible, which we used to revise the draft before submitting to the D.C. Council in the spring.

In the pursuit of full transparency, throughout this process we took notes on the input received, posted them online, and we created a document listing the recorded ideas to be included, with the rationale for why we did or did not include the various ideas received in the final policy. We then held a series of trainings and engagement with principals, who are training their staff on the new and better policy we will implement this fall. In addition, students were trained as peer educators to communicate the policy and support other students to implement it in their schools.

This process is just one example of the process to engage school communities in any such change in policy, such as the new School Scorecards we are building to better share school performance information with parents and

to raise accountability for our work. These “report cards for schools” will increase transparency, make school performance data easier to track and read, and they are being created with the significant engagement from the community that is so invested in the success of DCPS.

Through our Office of Public Engagement, created before the 2008-2009 school year, our stakeholders have access to key information and ample opportunities to be heard. Equally important, this office makes sure that DCPS engages families and the public in a manner that allows us to listen and learn from the valuable feedback and experience of our stakeholders. We will continue to work closely with the families and the communities we serve as we pursue our shared goal of increasing student achievement.

#### Moving Forward

We have no illusions about the work that lies ahead. Right now in this city, a student’s race remains a determining factor in the number and quality of choices that student will have upon exiting the public schools. This is inexcusable, and it becomes more painfully acute to anyone who visits our schools, speaks with our students and sees directly how capable and curious they are. We are working furiously to correct this injustice, and we have made significant progress over the past two years. The accomplishments we have shared with you, the most important of which belong to our students, we believe merit recognition in any measure or oversight of this rewarding work.

As we all continue this forward movement with our school staff and students, I remain grateful for your support, and I am happy to answer your questions.

**D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS:  
TAKING STOCK OF EDUCATION REFORM**

**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**

**JULY 23, 2009**

Good morning Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and members of the subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before you today to report on the continued progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the Mayor's public education reform initiatives. Over the past two years, the District has become a focal point for the national education reform community, and I believe what we are doing here, and the progress we are making, can and will serve as a model to other urban jurisdictions seeking to improve dramatically the public educational opportunities available to children.

As we explained to the Committee last year, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) was established to perform two main functions: 1) to ensure that the education reform efforts of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and the Ombudsman for Public Education are aligned in priorities and strategies; and 2) to marshal the District's resources – public and private, education and non-education – to support education reform efforts and outcomes for all the District's students. My office has made significant progress on these fronts, and I am happy to share that progress today.

*Aligning Education Policies and Priorities*

From the beginning, the Mayor has asked us to focus on implementation and accountability for results. In preparing to take over the school system, we noted the numerous reports and plans that had been developed – and subsequently, had piled up – over the years and resolved to hold ourselves accountable for execution and results. My office's role is to make sure we are all moving at the same pace, on the same page, and on the right track. We problem-solve where



there are obstacles or issues, keep staff focused on the agenda, and help develop the right strategy to address a given issue.

Alignment of strategies comes in many forms, but almost always involves convening the right people around the table. Prior to the Mayor's reform, this was the missing piece. City leaders would constantly hear the complaint from agencies that the school system was not at the table, and likewise the school system would complain that they had little or no collaboration with other city agencies. Alignment of reform strategies became even more important as we separated state from local education functions and facilities and other education-related services from the school system.

We have established several mechanisms for regular, agenda-driven communication among the education agencies, at leadership and staff levels. My office also leads working groups and conversations around specific big-picture priority issues. For example, every other week, we host a working group focused on special education issues, composed of staff from the OSSE, DCPS, and the Office of the City Administrator. There is a similar working group focused on school health. Much of the alignment deals with the relationship among the OSSE, DCPS, and public charter schools – in particular, we continue to lead ongoing conversations around accountability and assessment, and have assisted with the integration of data systems for both OSSE and DCPS.

Similarly, at the program level, the DME has worked with both DCPS and the OSSE on developing strategies and policies for alternative education, discipline and attendance, and adult education programs. We are currently working with a public charter school on developing a

partnership with DCPS that will provide an alternative education option for DCPS and public charter school students, along with professional development and other resources for DCPS staff. Because of our unique position, we are also able to leverage resources and partnerships from other agencies, including utilizing the Office of the City Administrator and the child welfare agency to develop policies for truancy and attendance.

Finally, my office continues to work closely with DCPS, OPEFM, and city planning staff around school facilities planning, and the Mayor recently submitted to the Council a revised Master Facilities Plan that will modernize every classroom over the next five years. We are also developing a coherent planning structure for DCPS, charter school, and excess school facilities. Utilizing the District's school facility assets strategically, we can create better learning environments and expanded opportunities for children across the city.

Through these efforts, I am confident that the education strategies and policies of District agencies are aligned. The June 2009 draft GAO report came to the same conclusion after careful review.

*Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission*

The other major focus of the DME over the past two years has been the initiatives associated with the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission, ICSIC. Identifying the needs of children and families inside and outside of the classroom and figuring out how to address them by creating innovation and coordinating existing efforts within other agencies is challenging and intense. However, early results are promising and demonstrate that we are on the right track.

Part of our charge from the Public Education Reform Act is to develop and incubate innovative programs that address issues affecting social and emotional development of students, school climate and safety, and alcohol and substance abuse. We do this by researching and selecting evidence-based programs and initiatives and then piloting them carefully at the school level. At the end of the pilot period, the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and then transition them to a home agency where they can be scaled up and implemented permanently.

This past school year we successfully implemented the DC START multidisciplinary school mental health and intervention program. We hired seven social worker clinicians to serve students at six DCPS elementary schools and one middle school. The clinicians receive extensive supervision and training, and function as important members of the school staff. We strongly believe in the DC START model and its comprehensive approach to early intervention. Of particular importance is the family outreach component of the program. Clinicians have assisted parents and families with finding employment, addressing housing issues, and seeking help with financial, health, and substance abuse issues. By connecting the wellness of the home to the wellness of the child in the classroom, we aim to take early intervention services to a new level.

In addition to DC START, ICSIC has implemented four other evidence-based programs this year:

- Second Step, a violence prevention curriculum teachers can utilize that addresses aggressive behaviors and emphasizes positive peer interactions and social competency;

- Life Skills, an alcohol- and substance-abuse prevention program being taught by health and physical education teachers in elementary and middle schools;
- School Resource Officer (SRO) training, a program designed to train Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) school resource officers in research-based techniques and practices based on the community policing model in order to improve school safety and climate and the relationship among safety officers, school staff, and students; and
- Primary Project, a school-based early intervention program being implemented by the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to address social and emotional needs of children in pre-kindergarten through first grade as they transition into school.

Combining Second Step, Life Skills, and DC START, we are serving over 5,500 students at 50 schools. Adding in SRO training and Primary Project, over 300 DCPS, MPD, and DMH staff working in schools have been trained in the past eight months. My office works steadily on monitoring the programs and their implementation, reaching out to school-based staff, and problem-solving to ensure that the programs are utilized effectively and have the maximum positive impact on students and families.

Finally, we continue to work across agencies through ICSIC to improve outcomes related to health, student achievement, youth engagement, and transition to adulthood. Highlights of the past year include:

- With a committee composed of representatives of DCPS, Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC), and community-based organizations, there is a new, improved structure for out-of-school-time (OST) programs, ensuring that every DCPS has a quality OST program that matches

the needs of the school community. This structure has been so successful that we are now working to implement it citywide with five major agencies that utilize community-based organizations to provide services to children and families.

- Leveraging the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) federal grant awarded to the District last year, we have developed professional development for school and administrative staff, placed emergency-safety flipchart books in every school classroom in the District, and created a school emergency plan for every public school.
- Through the school health working group mentioned earlier, we have steered the development of school health regulations, improvement of curriculum and program issues within schools, and development of a plan to expand access to school-based health centers at high schools over the next five years.

The goal of all of these efforts is to provide a safer, more supportive learning environment for students so that they can take full advantage of the educational opportunities made available to them.

While I think the Committee can agree that we have made substantial progress in only two years, we have much work left to be done. With this in mind, we endeavor to continue moving forward, with an unwavering commitment to implementation and results. Again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues today. I look forward to your questions.

**D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS:  
TAKING STOCK OF EDUCATION REFORM**

**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 KERRI L. BRIGGS, PH.D.  
ACTING STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**JULY 23, 2009**

Good afternoon Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, distinguished members of the subcommittee, committee staff and guests. I am Kerri Briggs and I serve as the Acting State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia. It is my pleasure to be here this afternoon to discuss the role of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in the Mayor's effort to reform education in DC.

It is truly a special time for education reform in the District. We have a Mayor, a Council, a schools chancellor, many principals and charter school leaders who are dedicated to improving schools for our students. Thousands of dedicated teachers and other staff are joining in and embracing a new culture of achievement. Last but not least, we have a federal stimulus that includes millions of dollars to support academic innovation.

When my predecessor became state superintendent in 2007, she took on a role that never before existed – and she did a tremendous job of uniting disparate agencies into one cohesive whole. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) was created two years ago to comply with federal education law and is designated as the “state education agency.” This office was created to manage federal funds so that the local education agencies (DCPS and charter school LEAs) could focus on working with schools. My office is also responsible for two vital pieces of a quality education system: housing a data system to effectively track student academic performance and the licensure of teachers and principals within DCPS.

In my short time serving in this role, I have identified certain challenges ahead of us, one of which is discussed in the GAO report. In 2006 and again last year, the U.S. Department of

Education placed DC schools on “high risk” status due to mismanagement of grants, and failure to comply with federal rules. After nearly eight years with the U.S. Department of Education, I know the ins and outs of the system. I have seen firsthand how the relationship between federal, state and local agencies can have a profound impact on kids. I am confident the priorities we are setting at the state level will maximize the impact of the Chancellor’s reform efforts.

That’s why my colleagues and I have been working diligently to correct these problems. OSSE is working with the U.S. Department of Education to address our high risk grantee status through the design and implementation of a comprehensive and strategic Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

In my first 3 months, the CAP has been designated as OSSE’s top priority and a dedicated team of analysts has been assembled and moved to the front office of the organization to steward this reform effort. OSSE is using our CAP as an opportunity to drive reform and implement change throughout the entire organization.

To that end, OSSE is committed to using stimulus funds to advance American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA) principles set forth by the U.S. Department of Education:

- \* Expand and improve early learning opportunities.
- \* Raise standards and improve assessments.
- \* Recruit, retain and support effective educators, and ensure that they are equitably distributed.
- \* Build robust data systems that track student progress and improve practice.



- \* Turn around low-performing schools, focusing on dropout factories and their feeder schools.
- \* Expand college access and completion.

We are set to distribute funds quickly to LEAs and other entities in order to avert layoffs as well as create jobs, to raise student achievement through school improvement and reform, to ensure transparency, reporting, and accountability, and to measure and track results.

CAP processes are being embedded within the organization and are being applied to our receipt and use of ARRA Stimulus Funds. ARRA and our high risk grantee status are providing OSSE with the opportunity to set new standards around federal grants management. We will also take advantage of the ARRA reporting requirements to gather and analyze data that in turn will inform future policy decisions.

It is OSSE's sole fiduciary responsibility to receive, distribute and account for all ARRA education funds in the District including the funds awarded under the Government Services portion of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This may include such non-educational institutions as DC's Department of Housing and Community Development.

It is my intention to pursue all available ARRA funding opportunities. In cases where DC's high risk status may hinder being awarded additional competitive grant monies, I intend to seek partnerships in hopes a collaborative or consortium will strengthen the District's application.

The result of this work will see DC educators taking maximum advantage of federal and local funds, it will ensure every taxpayer dollar is used as effectively and efficiently as possible, and our federal funders will no longer consider us a “high risk” investment.

At the same time we are cleaning up our business operations, we also are working on efforts to improve student achievement. My team is currently assessing our data systems and capabilities, and will work aggressively to improve upon them to make data an effective tool at the school, district, and state level. The first step in that process is to develop and implement the Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data system (SLED).

Once built, the SLED will enable the sharing of critical information that tracks student learning spanning early childcare, preschool, K-12, post-secondary, and adult-serving education. It will ultimately link to other youth and adult-serving institutions to provide a comprehensive picture of the District of Columbia’s learner populations. This information will assist in meeting educational needs and increasing stakeholder involvement by supporting trend analysis, performance projections, program implementation, program evaluation, and better planning. Stakeholders will use the SLED data to identify which factors contribute to closing the achievement gap, determine the kinds of programs that work best for particular students, and identify strong school settings and educational best practices that are improving student achievement.

During the past year, the production of the unique student identifier (USI), which included student demographic enrollment information, was released. The USI is the key lever for linking all student data together within the SLED and with all other educational systems within OSSE.

In February 2009, OSSE provided assessment data to LEAs at the student level dating back to 2006. This was the first time LEAs received currently enrolled student data, enabling administrators and schools to make programmatic decisions. The SLED team provided technical assistance to LEAs on how to interpret the data and look for trends among students to improve instruction.

The state superintendent's office also sets teacher quality criteria as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. As of October 2006, OSSE changed its criteria to align with the federal definition of "highly qualified." Under this definition, all teachers must have at a minimum a bachelor's degree, state certification, and demonstrate subject area knowledge through a competency test, an evaluation, or completion of additional degrees or credentialing.

Accountability extends to more than our students and schools, but to our internal management performance as well. In an effort to create a culture of accountability, the ePerformance management system was instituted on October 2008. It established clear expectations for all staff within the agency at the beginning of a set rating period. This user-friendly, paperless system allows for a smooth and continuous flow of information from manager to employee. Supervisors and employees cooperatively set goals and individual development plans.

ePerformance has been operational since January of 2009. OSSE has successfully moved through the implementation timeline and will close mid-year discussions this month, during which supervisors held formal meetings with employees to discuss performance and development. We are looking forward to completing the last phase of training for all supervisory employees this September, final evaluations of all employees by November, and a successful implementation of all elements as planned by the end of this year. I am confident that this system is setting clear expectations for all employees which is an integral part of working towards achieving the OSSE's strategic objectives.

The reforms that the District has put in place represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform our broken school system and our strategic plan will make the state superintendent's office more nimble, more responsive, and more accountable to families and taxpayers. It means issuing clear and timely guidance to help educators access available resources. It means focusing energy and resources on the challenges identified in the OSSE strategic plan: inadequate grants management, lack of access to quality special education, and the need for a reliable data system to track student achievement. It also means collaborating with other states to develop rigorous, research-based, internationally benchmarked common standards to make sure that when DC students graduate from high school, they are prepared to succeed in college, and to compete in the global marketplace.

The good news is that we are seeing results of the Mayor's reform efforts. Preliminary results of the 2009 DC Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) show continued progress in student achievement. Overall, reading scores are up 3 points and math scores are up 6 points over 2008.

Reading and math scores went up in both elementary and secondary schools and across DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools (PCS).

As you know, my agency does not work directly with schools, but we can and must free talented educators of the red tape that currently binds them. If we do a better job of allocating resources and human capital, they will have greater flexibility and freedom to help our students improve.

United States Government Accountability Office

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**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

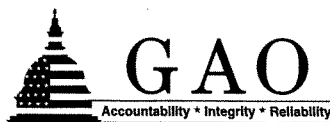
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For Release on Delivery  
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Thursday, July 23, 2009

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Implementation and  
Sustainability of Reform  
Efforts Could Benefit From  
Enhanced Planning**

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



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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 the District) progress in reforming its public school system. The District's school system has had long-standing problems with student academic performance, the condition of school facilities, and its overall management. The District's public schools have fallen well behind the District's own targets for demonstrating adequate yearly progress toward meeting the congressionally mandated goal of having 100 percent of students proficient in math, reading, and science by 2014, as outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). In addition, the U. S. Department of Education (Education) designated the District as a high-risk grantee in April 2006 because of its poor management of federal grants. Of the nearly \$762 million the District spends on D. C. public schools (DCPS), 16 percent comes from federal sources. My remarks today are based on our report released at this hearing, entitled *District of Columbia Public Schools: Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability*.<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to address the school system's long-standing problems, the Council of the District of Columbia (D.C. Council) approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (Reform Act), which made major changes to the operations and governance of the school district.<sup>2</sup> The Reform Act gave the Mayor broad authority over the District's public school system, including curricula, operations, budget, personnel, and school facilities. In doing so, the District joined a growing number of cities to adopt mayoral governance of public school systems in an effort to expedite major reforms. The Reform Act transferred the day-to-day management of the public schools from the Board of Education to the Mayor and placed DCPS under the Mayor's office as a cabinet-level agency. It also moved the state functions into a new state superintendent's office, established a separate facilities office, and created the D.C. Department of Education headed by the Deputy Mayor for Education.

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *District of Columbia Public Schools: Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability*, GAO-09-619 (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-33.

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Because of the broad changes in governance, Congress asked GAO to evaluate the District's reform efforts. In our report, we addressed the following questions: (1) What steps has the District taken to address student academic achievement? (2) What actions has the District taken to strengthen the quality of teachers and principals? (3) To what extent have the District's education offices<sup>3</sup> developed and implemented long-term plans and how has DCPS used stakeholder input in key initiatives? (4) What steps have DCPS and the state superintendent's office taken to improve their accountability and performance?<sup>4</sup>

To answer these questions, we reviewed and analyzed relevant documents and research and interviewed officials from the District's education offices. We also interviewed representatives of education and research associations, and various organizations based in the Washington, D.C. community. Across all our objectives, we measured the progress of ongoing reform efforts against any implementation time frames established by DCPS or the state superintendent's office. We based our evaluation of completed initiatives on relevant recognized standards, such as those established by GAO in past reports. To provide a broader national context for our work, we visited four urban school districts with mayoral governance: Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City. We based our selection of these districts on how long the school district had been under mayoral control and student demographic information. We interviewed high-level officials—such as superintendents and former superintendents, school board presidents and members, officials from majors' offices—as well as union leaders, and representatives from various community and research organizations in these cities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The District's education offices include the District of Columbia Public Schools, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the District of Columbia's Department of Education.

<sup>4</sup>We also testified in March 2008 about the status of the reform efforts. See GAO, *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*, GAO-08-549T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 14, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>We performed our work from May 2008 through June 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



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In summary, DCPS's early efforts to improve student achievement focused on implementing initiatives to improve student performance, including implementing a new staffing model; restructuring underperforming schools; and creating and enhancing data systems. DCPS is refocusing or revising its approach to many of these initiatives as it continues to implement them. DCPS is also attempting to improve the quality of its teacher and principal workforce by hiring new teachers and principals and by providing professional development, but it has encountered challenges in effectively implementing these changes. DCPS officials told us that the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 teacher evaluation process did not allow them to assess whether the teacher workforce improved between these 2 school years and that they are working to develop a new teacher evaluation system. The state superintendent's office and DCPS each developed 5-year strategic plans and involved stakeholders in developing these plans. While DCPS has recently increased efforts to involve stakeholders such as parents and the D.C. Council in key initiatives, past stakeholder involvement was inconsistent. DCPS and the state superintendent's office also have taken steps to improve accountability and performance of their offices. While DCPS has taken steps to improve accountability and link its individual performance management system to organizational goals, it has not yet linked its employee expectations and performance evaluations to organizational goals.

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**DCPS Quickly  
Implemented Many  
Separate Initiatives to  
Improve Overall  
Student Performance  
and Is Refocusing Its  
Approach as It Moves  
Forward**

During the first 2 years of its reform efforts, DCPS implemented several classroom-based initiatives to improve students' basic skills in core subjects. For example, to improve students' basic skills and standardized test scores in reading and math, DCPS introduced targeted interventions for students struggling in these subjects and provided additional instruction and practice to improve students' responses to open-ended questions, including test questions. Table 1 provides a list of DCPS's major initiatives to improve student outcomes, as well as descriptions and the status of these initiatives.

Table 1: Status of Major Academic Initiatives during the First 2 Years of DCPS Reform Efforts

Initiative	How it works	The initiatives target:			School year (SY) initiative was (or will be) launched and status	Being revised
		Reading and math skills	Standardized test scores	Student engagement		
<b>Reading and math interventions</b>	Provides supplemental intensive instruction and practice for struggling students	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	✓
<b>Saturday classes for targeted students</b>	Extends class time to Saturdays; primarily targeted to students close to meeting academic targets	✓	✓	✓	SY 2007-2008; ongoing	
<b>Targeted instructional practices</b>	Provides additional practice on answering short answer test questions, using calculators, and playing math games	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	
<b>Pacing guides</b>	Provides guidance to teachers to help focus instruction on what students are expected to know and testing timetable	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	✓
<b>Capital Gains</b>	Offers money to students for attendance, behavior, and academic performance			✓	SY 2008-2009; may be expanded	
<b>Staffing model</b>	Provides access to art, music, and physical education as well as supports for all students			✓	SY 2008-2009; ongoing	✓
<b>Teaching and learning framework (planned)</b>	Provides guidance to teachers on how to plan, deliver, and evaluate instruction	✓	✓	✓	Expected to be implemented in SY 2009-2010	

Source: GAO analysis of DCPS documents.

DCPS is modifying its approach to implementing many of these initiatives as it moves forward. For example, the Chancellor recently acknowledged that DCPS, in its effort to remedy the range of issues that plagued the District's public schools, may have launched too many initiatives at once and some schools may not have had the capacity to implement so many programs effectively. In particular, some schools were undergoing significant organizational changes that may have affected their ability to implement these new academic initiatives. To support such schools, DCPS is considering offering a choice of programs for schools and allowing the principals to determine which programs best suit their schools' needs and capacity.

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DCPS does not yet know how successful these initiatives have been in improving student achievement. Our report notes that DCPS elementary and secondary students increased their reading and math scores between 8 and 11 percentage points on the 2008 state-wide test, but it is unclear whether these gains could be attributed to the current reform efforts or to prior efforts. Preliminary scores for the 2009 reading and math tests were announced on July 13, 2009. Elementary students made modest gains in reading (49 percent were proficient in reading, up from 46 percent in 2008) and more substantial gains in math (49 percent proficient in math, up from 40 percent in 2008). Preliminary scores for secondary students show that 41 percent are proficient in reading, up from 39 percent in 2008, and 40 percent are proficient in math, up from 36 percent in 2008.<sup>6</sup> While DCPS officials told us that it is generally difficult to isolate and quantify the impact of any single program on student achievement, they plan in late summer 2009 to analyze student outcomes, including state-wide test scores, to assess the effectiveness of various initiatives.

DCPS officials also noted that there were varying levels of teacher quality and knowledge of effective teaching practices, and that it was difficult to ensure the extent to which teachers implemented the programs effectively. While DCPS had not previously defined "effective" teaching, DCPS officials told us they will focus on practicing effective teaching, as opposed to implementing various disparate programs. By the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, DCPS plans to implement a framework that is intended to help teachers understand what students are expected to learn for each subject, how to prepare lessons, and what effective teaching methods are to be used.

DCPS also changed the way it allocated teachers across its schools for the 2008-2009 school year. This new staffing model was intended to provide all schools with a core of teachers including art, music, and physical education, as well as social workers. It was also intended to provide all schools with reading coaches who work with teachers to improve reading instruction. Prior to this change, DCPS allocated funding to schools using

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<sup>6</sup>Under NCLBA, each state creates its own content standards, academic achievement tests, and proficiency targets. States are required to test all children for reading and mathematics achievement annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school to determine whether schools are meeting academic targets. While a greater percentage of D.C. students reached proficiency levels set by the District, a smaller percentage of schools—27 percent compared to 31 percent in 2008—met proficiency targets set by the District. The District's proficiency targets were the same for both years.

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a weighted student formula, which distributed funds to schools on a per pupil basis, so that the greater the enrollment of a school, the greater the amount allocated to that school.<sup>7</sup> The new staffing model was intended to ensure core staff at all schools regardless of enrollment. While DCPS allowed principals to request changes to the staffing model based on their school's needs,<sup>8</sup> it did not establish or communicate clear guidance or criteria on how such requests would be treated. Therefore, it is unclear whether similar requests were treated in a consistent manner. A more transparent process, one that publicly shared their rationale for such decisions, would have helped assure stakeholders, including the D.C. Council, that changes to staffing allocations were made consistently and fairly. The D.C. Council and several community groups have criticized the process for its lack of transparency and questioned the fairness of the decisions made. For example, one independent analysis concluded that under the staffing model some schools received less per pupil funding than others with similar student populations.<sup>9</sup> DCPS revamped its approach for the staffing model for the 2009-2010 school year to address some of these challenges. For example, it established guidance about what changes it will allow principals to make to the staffing model and disseminated this guidance to school leaders at the beginning of the budgeting process. According to DCPS, the new guidance is expected to reduce the number of changes that principals request later in the process.

In addition, as required by NCLBA, DCPS restructured 22 schools before the fall of 2008, after the schools failed to meet academic targets for 6 consecutive years. NCLBA specifies five options for restructuring a school, including replacing selected staff or contracting with another organization or company to run the school. DCPS revamped its process for determining

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<sup>7</sup>The state superintendent's office continues to provide funding to DCPS and charter schools on a per pupil basis. In addition to a standard funding amount, students with certain characteristics are funded at greater levels to account for the increased cost of educating them. For example, schools with students who are English language learners and students with disabilities are allocated additional funds.

<sup>8</sup>Under the new staffing model, a school may choose to trade a position offered by the new staffing model for another position based on its needs. For example, a school may employ an art teacher funded by a private entity and trade the art position assigned by the staffing model for a regular classroom teacher.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Levy, An Analysis of DCPS General Education Resources in Local School Budgets for FY 2009 (Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, December 2008). DCPS officials told us that they conducted their own analysis in an effort to minimize such differences in the future. GAO did not conduct an independent analysis of the per pupil allocations across schools.

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the most appropriate restructuring option for the 13 schools that will be restructured in the 2009-2010 school year. Prior to implementing the first round of restructuring (for the 2008-2009 school year), DCPS officials told us there were insufficient school visits and inadequate training and guidance for teams assigned to evaluate which restructuring option was best suited for a given school. DCPS has addressed these issues by requiring two visits to each school, offering more training, and revising the form used to evaluate each school's condition for the next round of restructuring. Restructuring underperforming schools will likely be an ongoing initiative for DCPS, as 89 of its 118 schools were in some form of school improvement status as of June 2009.

Finally, DCPS and the state superintendent's office are planning and developing new ways to use data to monitor student achievement and school performance. DCPS reported it has ongoing and planned initiatives to expand data access to principals and teachers, in part to monitor student and school performance. In particular, DCPS reported making improvements to its primary student data system so central office users can better monitor school performance. DCPS also plans to use monthly reports to enable school leaders to better monitor student progress, but DCPS officials told us they have delayed some of these efforts while they attempt to improve coordination among the various departments that were developing and disseminating information to school leaders. The state superintendent's office also is developing a longitudinal database, called the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED), intended to allow DCPS and other stakeholders to access a broad array of information, including standardized test scores of students and information on teachers.<sup>10</sup> According to officials in the state superintendent's office, they revised the project schedule to allow more time to assist the charter schools with updating their data systems. In February 2009, the initial release of student data provided a student identification number and information on student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches and other student demographics for all students attending DCPS's schools and the public charter schools. The state superintendent's office plans for SLED to enable DCPS to link student and teacher data by February 2010.

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<sup>10</sup>SLED is intended to enable the sharing of critical information spanning a student's lifelong public education experience in the District from early childhood to college and other postsecondary education. SLED is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grants Program. Education's Institute of Education Sciences provides monitoring and technical assistance for the project.

## DCPS Replaced Teachers and Principals and Introduced Professional Development Initiatives, but Encountered Challenges in Implementation

DCPS focused on a workforce replacement strategy to strengthen teacher and principal quality. After the 2007-2008 school year, about one-fifth of the teachers and one-third of the principals resigned, retired, or were terminated from DCPS. DCPS terminated about 350 teachers and an additional 400 teachers accepted financial incentives offered by DCPS to resign or retire in the spring of 2008.<sup>11</sup> In addition, DCPS did not renew the contracts of 42 principals. To replace the teachers and principals who left the system, DCPS launched a nationwide recruitment effort for the 2008-2009 school year and hired 566 teachers and 46 principals for the 2008-2009 school year.<sup>12</sup> DCPS did not have a new teacher contract in place due to ongoing negotiations with the Washington Teachers' Union and DCPS officials told us a lack of contract may have hindered their efforts to attract top-quality teachers. Under the plan, which has been in negotiation with the Washington Teachers' Union since November 2007, the Chancellor has stated that she wants to recruit and retain quality teachers by offering merit pay, which would reward teachers with higher salaries based, in part, on their students' scores on standardized state tests.

In addition, DCPS officials told us that the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 teacher evaluation process did not allow them to assess whether the teacher workforce improved between these 2 school years. According to DCPS officials, this system does not measure teachers' impact on student achievement—a key factor cited by DCPS officials in evaluating teacher effectiveness. DCPS plans to revise its teacher evaluation process to more directly link teacher performance to student achievement. To supplement school administrators' observations of teachers, DCPS is also seeking to add classroom observations by 36 third-party observers, called master teachers, who would be knowledgeable about teaching the relevant subject matter and grade level.

In addition, DCPS introduced professional development initiatives for teachers and principals, but late decisions about the program for teachers led to inconsistent implementation. For the 2008-2009 school year, DCPS

<sup>11</sup>DCPS terminated 248 teachers in June 2009. According to a document provided by the Washington Teachers' Union, 117 of these teachers were terminated for failing to get proper licensure. In addition, 70 of the 248 terminated teachers were subject to the 90-day evaluation process—including 55 tenured teachers and 15 probationary teachers. Sixty-one additional probationary teachers were also terminated.

<sup>12</sup>DCPS did not need to hire the same number of teachers as the number who left the school system after the 2007-2008 school year because 29 schools closed and district-wide enrollment had again declined by the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year.

hired about 150 teacher coaches to improve teachers' skills in delivering reading and math instruction and boost student test scores. According to DCPS, teacher coaches assisted teachers with interpreting student test scores, planning lessons, and using their classroom time constructively. DCPS is planning for teacher coaches to work with teachers in all grades and subjects for the 2009-2010 school year. DCPS intended to staff about 170 teacher coaching positions; however, as DCPS began the 2008-2009 school year, about 20 percent of the coaching positions remained open (19 reading coach vacancies and 16 math coach vacancies) because of late hiring of teacher coaches. DCPS officials told us they made the decision to hire teacher coaches after their review of school restructuring plans in June 2008. The ratio of teachers to coaches was higher than it would have been had the positions been filled. In addition, according to DCPS officials and Washington Teachers' Union officials we interviewed, teacher coaches were often uncertain about their responsibilities and how to work with teachers, and received some conflicting guidance from principals.

**The State Superintendent's Office and DCPS Have Developed and Begun Implementing Strategic Plans; However, DCPS Has Not Always Involved Relevant Stakeholders in Planning and Implementing Key Initiatives**

The state superintendent's office and DCPS each developed their 5-year strategic plans and involved stakeholders in the process. Stakeholder involvement in formulating strategic plans allows relevant stakeholders to share their views and concerns. The state superintendent's office and the State Board of Education collaboratively developed the District's state-level, 5-year strategic plan, and released it in October 2008. This state-level plan spans early childhood and kindergarten through grade 12 education (including public charter schools).<sup>13</sup> Officials from the state superintendent's office told us they involved District officials, and stakeholders representing early childhood education, business, and higher education communities, as well as other stakeholders while drafting the plan. In September 2008, the state superintendent's office held a public forum to solicit stakeholder input and accepted comments on the draft on its Web site. The office released a revised version of the plan within a month of the public forum.

DCPS released the draft of its 5-year strategic plan in late October 2008. In contrast to the state-level plan which includes the public charter schools, the DCPS plan is specific to prekindergarten through grade 12 education in its 128 schools. DCPS officials told us they based the draft on the Master

<sup>13</sup>The state superintendent's office serves as a state education agency for DCPS and 59 public charter schools, as of March 2009.

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Education Plan,<sup>14</sup> which the prior DCPS administration developed with stakeholder involvement, and that they sought additional stakeholder input through a series of town hall meetings. After releasing the draft, DCPS held three public forums in the following 3 weeks where attendees provided DCPS officials with feedback on the draft strategic plan. In May 2009, DCPS released the revised draft, which incorporated stakeholder feedback. Officials from the D.C. Deputy Mayor of Education's office told us that as part of their office's coordinating role, it ensured that DCPS and the state-level strategic plans were aligned. However, the office had no documentation showing its efforts to coordinate these plans, such as an alignment study. We found that the two plans were aligned in terms of long-term goals. For example, DCPS's goals could support the state-level goal of having all schools ready. However, we could not evaluate whether more detailed, objective measures and performance targets were aligned because the DCPS strategic plan did not always include specific objective measures and performance targets.

DCPS recently increased its efforts to involve stakeholders in various initiatives; however, it has not always involved stakeholders in key decisions and initiatives. DCPS officials told us they have a variety of approaches to involve stakeholders, including parents, students, and community groups, as well as institutional stakeholders such as the D.C. Council. For example, DCPS officials told us they reach out to parents, students, and the public through monthly community forums, meeting with a group of high school student leaders and a parent advisory group, responding to e-mail, and conducting annual parent and student surveys to gauge the school system's performance. DCPS also involved other stakeholders, such as parent organizations and the Washington Teachers' Union in its process of changing the discipline policy. However, according to two DCPS officials, DCPS did not have a planning process in place to ensure systematic stakeholder involvement, and we found that DCPS implemented some key initiatives with limited stakeholder involvement.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>The Master Education Plan dated February 2006 was developed and released by the Superintendent of D.C. schools and the D.C. Board of Education. According to the plan, there was a high degree of stakeholder involvement in developing the 122-page plan, including five community forums, three forums sponsored by the Washington Teachers' Union, and over 15,000 parents participating through phone surveys.

<sup>15</sup>After reading the draft of our report, DCPS officials identified four steps they said DCPS takes to involve stakeholders in key decisions. We requested documentation showing that these steps had been in place during the 2008-2009 school year; however, DCPS did not provide such documentation.



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For example, key stakeholders, including D.C. Council members and parent groups, told us they were not given the opportunity to provide input on DCPS's initial proposals regarding school closures and consolidations, the establishment of schools that spanned prekindergarten to grade 8, or the planning and early implementation of the new staffing model that placed art, music, and physical education teachers at schools and which fundamentally changed the way funding is allocated across DCPS.

Lack of stakeholder involvement in such key decisions led stakeholders, including the D.C. Council and parents groups, to voice concerns that DCPS was not operating in a transparent manner or obtaining input from stakeholders with experience relevant to the District's education system. Further, these stakeholders have questioned whether the impact of reform efforts will be compromised because of restricted stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders in the other urban school districts we visited told us a lack of stakeholder involvement leads to less transparency as key decisions are made without public knowledge or discourse. In addition, the lack of stakeholder involvement can result in an erosion of support for ongoing reform efforts and poor decisions. For example, officials in Chicago and Boston said public stakeholder involvement was critical to community support for various initiatives, such as decisions on which schools to close. Officials and stakeholders in New York cited a lack of stakeholder involvement in decisions that were eventually reversed or revised.

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**DCPS and the State Superintendent's Office Have Taken Steps to Improve Accountability and Performance, and DCPS Has Yet to Align Key Aspects of Its Performance Management System to Organizational Goals**

DCPS has taken steps to improve accountability and performance of its central office. To improve accountability for central office departments, DCPS developed departmental scorecards to identify and assess performance expectations for each department. According to a DCPS official, these scorecards are discussed at weekly accountability meetings with the Chancellor to hold senior-level managers accountable for meeting performance expectations. In addition, in January 2008, DCPS implemented a new performance management system for employees. Performance management systems for employees are generally used to set individual expectations, assess and reward individual performance, and plan work.<sup>16</sup> In addition, as we previously reported in our March 2008 testimony, DCPS developed individual performance evaluations as a part of its performance management system in order to assess central office employees' performance. Previously, performance evaluations were not conducted for most DCPS staff. Individual performance evaluations are now used to assess central office employees on several core competencies twice a year.

Prior to our March 2008 testimony, DCPS officials told us that they intended to align the performance management system with organizational goals by January 2009, and DCPS has taken some steps to improve alignment. For example, DCPS officials told us they had better aligned their departmental scorecards to their 2009 annual performance plan. However, DCPS has not yet explicitly linked employee performance evaluations to the agency's overall goals. DCPS officials told us they plan to do so in the summer of 2009.

The state superintendent's office also implemented a new performance management system, effective October 2008, to hold its employees accountable and improve the office's performance. The office is converting to a single electronic management system to track and evaluate employee performance by December 2009. According to an official from the state superintendent's office, this system links individual employee evaluations to overall performance goals and the office's strategic plan. Under this new evaluation system, each employee is given a position description, which includes responsibilities and duties linked to the overall goals, mission, and vision of the state superintendent's office.

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<sup>16</sup>Effective performance management systems can be used strategically to drive internal change, achieve desired results, and provide continuity during transitions. GAO, *Results-Oriented Cultures: Creating a Clear Linkage between Individual Performance and Organizational Success*, GAO-03-488 (Washington, D.C. Mar. 14, 2003).

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Individual and agency expectations are defined in an annual performance meeting with the employee. The office is currently training supervisory employees on how to use the system before its full implementation in December 2009.

In addition to implementing a performance management system, the State Superintendent has begun to address long-term deficiencies identified by Education related to federal grant management. Education designated the District as a high-risk grantee 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. As noted in a recent GAO report<sup>17</sup>, the state superintendent's office uses findings from an annual audit as part of its risk assessment and monitoring of subrecipients. The findings are used to design monitoring programs and determine risk levels for each school district, and the risk levels are used to develop monitoring strategies and work plans. The state superintendent's office developed a corrective action plan, which it reports to Education and intends to use the plan to strengthen the monitoring of the school districts.

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### Implementation of Recommendations Could Improve Sustainability of Reform Efforts

The District's Mayor and his education team have taken bold steps to improve the learning environment of the District's students. As more initiatives are developed, the need to balance the expediency of the reform efforts with measures to increase sustainability, such as stakeholder involvement, is critical. DCPS currently lacks certain planning processes, such as communicating information to stakeholders in a timely manner and incorporating stakeholder feedback at key junctures, which would allow for a more transparent process. Stakeholder consultation in planning and implementation efforts can help create a basic understanding of the competing demands that confront most agencies and the limited resources available to them. Continuing to operate without a more formal mechanism for stakeholder involvement could diminish support for the reform efforts, undermine their sustainability, and ultimately compromise the potential gains in student achievement. In addition, since the Reform Act, the District has taken several steps to improve central office operations, such as providing more accountability at the departmental

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<sup>17</sup>GAO, *Recovery Act: States' and Localities' Current and Planned Uses Of Funds While Facing Fiscal Stresses (Appendixes)*, GAO-09-830SP (Washington, D.C.: July 2009).

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level and implementing a new individual performance management system. However, DCPS has not yet aligned its performance management system, including its individual performance evaluations, to its organizational goals, which could result in a disparity between employees' daily activities and services needed to support schools. By ensuring that employees are familiar with the organizational goals and that their daily activities reflect these goals, DCPS could improve central office accountability and support to schools.

In our report that we publicly released today, we make two recommendations that could improve the implementation and sustainability of key initiatives in the District's transformation of its public school system. We recommend that the Mayor direct DCPS to:

- Establish planning processes that include mechanisms to evaluate its internal capacity and communicate information to stakeholders and, when appropriate, incorporate their views.
- Link individual performance evaluations to the agency's overall goals.

In written comments on the report, all three District education offices—DCPS, the state superintendent's office and the Deputy Mayor for Education—concurred with our recommendations. However, they expressed concern with the way in which we evaluated their reform efforts and the overall tone of the draft report. A summary of the District's response to our findings and recommendations, as well as our evaluation of the response, are contained on pages 41 and 42 of the report.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

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## Acknowledgements

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov. In addition, contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals who made key contributions to this testimony are Elizabeth Morrison, Assistant Director, Sheranda Campbell, and Nagla'a El-Hodiri.

United States Government Accountability Office

**GAO**

Report to 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

June 2009

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability

**This Report Is Temporarily Restricted Pending  
Official Public Release.**



GAO-09-619

June 2009

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability**


Highlights of GAO-09-619, a report to 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

**Why GAO Did This Study**

In response to long-standing problems with student achievement and the management of the District of Columbia (D.C. or the District) public school system, the D.C. Council approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007. This act made major changes to the governance of the D.C. public school system, giving the Mayor authority over public schools.

This report follows a GAO testimony in March 2008 and focuses on the primary reform approaches the District has taken. This report examines the steps the District took to: (1) address student academic achievement; (2) strengthen the quality of teachers and principals; (3) develop long-term plans and involve stakeholders; and (4) improve accountability and performance of the D.C. public schools (DCPS) and the state superintendent's central offices. GAO reviewed documentation on District initiatives, and interviewed District education officials as well as representatives from the teachers' union, community organizations, and research institutions. GAO also conducted visits to four urban school districts with mayoral governance.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO recommends that the Mayor direct DCPS to (1) establish planning processes that include evaluating internal capacity and involving stakeholders at key junctures; and (2) link individual performance evaluations for central office employees to organizational goals to strengthen accountability. The District's education offices agreed with GAO's recommendations and provided additional information which was incorporated as appropriate.

View GAO-09-619 or key components. For more information, contact Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov.

**What GAO Found**

Early efforts to improve student achievement at DCPS have focused on improving student performance, closing underutilized and reorganizing underperforming schools, and creating and enhancing data systems. During the first 2 years of its reform efforts, DCPS implemented many initiatives to improve overall student performance, such as classroom-based initiatives to improve basic skills of students. In addition, under the No Child Left Behind Act, DCPS restructured 22 schools before the fall of 2008, after the schools failed to meet academic targets for 6 consecutive years. Finally, DCPS and the state superintendent's office are developing new ways to monitor student achievement and school performance. Specifically, a longitudinal database is being developed that is intended to allow DCPS and other key users to access a broad array of data, including student test scores. DCPS is modifying its approach to many of these initiatives such as focusing on effective teaching as opposed to implementing disparate programs.

DCPS has focused on improving the quality of its workforce by replacing teachers and principals and by providing professional development, but it has encountered challenges in effectively implementing these changes. After the 2007-2008 school year, about one-fifth of the teachers and one-third of the principals resigned, retired, or were terminated from DCPS. However, because DCPS did not have an effective way to evaluate teacher performance, officials are uncertain if the new staff improved the quality of its workforce. DCPS is currently working on a new teacher evaluation system. In addition, DCPS introduced professional development initiatives for teachers and principals. For example, it began placing teacher coaches at schools to support teachers at their work sites. However, late decisions to hire these teacher coaches led to inconsistent implementation of this initiative during the 2008-2009 school year.

The state superintendent's office and DCPS each developed their 5-year strategic plans and involved stakeholders in developing these plans. The state superintendent plan and the DCPS draft strategic plan each contain many elements of effective plans, such as aligning short-term objectives to long-term goals. DCPS has recently increased its efforts to involve stakeholders in various initiatives; however, it has not always involved stakeholders in key decisions and initiatives.

DCPS and the state superintendent's office have taken steps to improve accountability and performance. For example, both offices have started implementation of new individual employee performance management systems. However, while DCPS has taken some additional steps to improve accountability, it has not yet linked its employee expectations and performance evaluations to organizational goals to improve central office operations.

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**Abbreviations**

AYP	adequate yearly progress
D.C. Council	Council of the District of Columbia
DCPS	District of Columbia public schools
Education	U.S. Department of Education
NCLBA	No Child Left Behind Act
Recovery Act	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
Reform Act	Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007
SLED	Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

June 26, 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka  
Chairman  
The Honorable George V. Voinovich  
Acting Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,  
the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The District of Columbia's (D.C. or the District) public school system has had long-standing problems with student academic performance, the condition of school facilities, and the overall management of the D.C. school system. For example, test scores have lagged behind those of most other urban districts in a nationally administered test. Further, the District's public schools have fallen well behind the District's own targets for demonstrating adequate yearly progress toward meeting the congressionally mandated goal of having 100 percent of students proficient in math, reading, and science by 2014, as outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). Some parents have been enrolling their children in charter schools, and student enrollment in D.C. public schools (DCPS)<sup>1</sup> has declined from 65,000 in 2000-2001 to 45,200 in 2008-2009, a decline of about 30 percent.<sup>2</sup> Of the nearly \$762 million the District spends on DCPS, 16 percent comes from federal sources.

There is an increasing urgency to address these persistent problems. In an effort to address the lack of academic progress, declining enrollment, and dilapidated buildings, the Council of the District of Columbia (D.C. Council) approved the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (Reform Act), which made major changes to the operations and

<sup>1</sup>In this report, when we refer to D.C. public schools, we are not including the D.C. public charter schools. Charter schools are public schools that are exempt from certain regulations in exchange for increased accountability for improving student achievement. This report does not include a discussion of charter schools, which are governed in the District by the Public Charter School Board.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Bureau data show that the District's school-age population (ages 5-19) declined by about 5 percent from 2000 to 2007.

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governance of the school district.<sup>3</sup> The act gave the Mayor broad authority over the District's public school system, including curricula, operations, budget, personnel, and school facilities. In doing so, the District joined a growing number of cities to adopt mayoral governance of public school systems in an effort to expedite major reforms.

Because of the District's past struggles to reform its public school system and the broad changes in governance, Congress asked GAO to evaluate the District's reform efforts. As part of this evaluation, we testified in March 2008 about the status of the reform efforts.<sup>4</sup> In that testimony, GAO recommended that the Mayor direct the D.C. Department of Education to develop a long-term district-wide education strategic plan that would 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. To provide further evaluation of the District's primary reform efforts, we addressed the following questions: (1) What steps has the District taken to address student academic achievement? (2) What actions has the District taken to strengthen the quality of teachers and principals? (3) To what extent have the District's education offices<sup>5</sup> developed and implemented long-term plans and how has DCPS used stakeholder input in key initiatives? (4) What steps have DCPS and the state superintendent's office taken to improve their accountability and performance?

To answer these questions, we reviewed and analyzed relevant documents and research and interviewed officials from the District's education offices, such as DCPS and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. For example, we interviewed high-ranking officials such as the State Superintendent of Education; the Chancellor of DCPS; and departmental leaders at DCPS, including the Interim Chief Academic Officer, the Deputy Chancellor for Human Resources and External

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<sup>3</sup>The D.C. Council approved the Reform Act on April 19, 2007. 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, 2007. Pub. L. No. 110-33. The Reform Act pertains primarily to the D.C. public school district, but also contains legislation relevant to the District's charter schools.

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *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*, GAO-08-549T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 14, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>The District's education offices include the District of Columbia Public Schools, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the District of Columbia's Department of Education.

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Relations, the Chief of Data and Accountability, and the head of the Transformation Management Office. We also interviewed representatives of education and research associations, and various organizations based in the Washington, D.C. community. Across all our objectives, we measured the progress of ongoing reform efforts against any implementation time frames established by DCPS or the state superintendent's office. We based our evaluation of completed initiatives on relevant recognized standards, such as those established by GAO in past reports. To understand the steps that have been taken to address student achievement, we gathered information about the various academic initiatives DCPS has planned or implemented, and reviewed and analyzed documentation of how schools were restructured. We assessed the reliability of the restructuring data for the 2008-2009 school year by reviewing documentation and interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We also interviewed eight principals from schools that had been consolidated as a result of the closure of 23 schools prior to the 2008-2009 school year primarily due to declining enrollments.<sup>6</sup> We reviewed and analyzed documentation—including state-level contracts and project plans—regarding efforts to improve data collection, quality, and usage. We did not independently verify reported improvements to DCPS and state superintendent's office data systems. To understand how the District was strengthening teacher and principal quality, we reviewed documents regarding teacher and principal recruitment, development, and evaluation, as well as licensure requirements. We also interviewed officials from the Washington Teachers' Union, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Council of School Officers (principals' union). To address the question on strategic planning and stakeholder involvement, we reviewed and analyzed strategic plans, interviewed cognizant officials from the District's education offices, and attended public discussions relevant to strategic planning, as well as D.C. Council hearings. We also interviewed the Chairman of the D.C. Council and representatives from several community and education organizations, including DC VOICE, the Council of the Great City Schools, and Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools.<sup>7</sup> To

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<sup>6</sup>There were 26 newly consolidated schools. We interviewed principals from the 8 that had received the greatest influx of students from the recently closed schools.

<sup>7</sup>DC VOICE is a community organization whose mission is to hold both the public schools and the community accountable for providing high-quality teaching and learning for all. The Council of the Great City Schools is an organization that represents 67 of the largest urban school systems in the United States, including DCPS. Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools is a parent advocacy organization.

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understand the steps that DCPS and the state superintendent's office have taken to improve performance and accountability, we reviewed the alignment of the individual performance management plans to organizational goals and the results of DCPS's internal customer satisfaction survey. To provide a broader national context for our work, we visited four urban school districts with mayoral governance: Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City. We based our selection of these districts on how long the school district had been under mayoral control and student demographic information. We interviewed high-level officials—including superintendents and former superintendents, school board presidents and members, officials from mayors' offices—as well as union leaders, and representatives from various community and research organizations in these cities. In addition, we asked officials in the District's education offices about their planned and actual use of economic stimulus funds provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act).<sup>8</sup>

We performed our work from May 2008 through June 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

### The District's Public School System

The District's prekindergarten through grade 12 school system is composed of 128 public schools<sup>9</sup> with enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year around 45,200. Historically, DCPS has had several problems that interfere with the education of its students. One primary problem was the dysfunction of the central office. For example, textbooks were not delivered on time or at all, parents complained about the lack of responsiveness of the central office, and teachers were not always paid on time. In addition, data systems were obsolete and inundated with errors,

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<sup>8</sup>P.L. 111-5.

<sup>9</sup>As of March 2009, the District had 59 public charter schools with enrollment for the 2008-2009 school year around 26,000.

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making it difficult to access basic information, such as the number of students enrolled at a school and student attendance rates. Such problems persisted in the D.C. public school system for several years despite numerous efforts to address them. In 1989, a report by the D.C. Committee on Public Education noted declining achievement levels as students moved through grades, the poor condition of the school system's physical facilities, and the lack of accountability among D.C. agencies for the schools.<sup>10</sup> 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 student achievement.<sup>11</sup>

Efforts to improve the District's schools often included new leadership to head the troubled school system. Over the last 20 years, DCPS has employed more than seven superintendents with an average tenure of 2.9 years. Such frequent changes in leadership may have further complicated efforts to improve student achievement, as each leader may have brought a different cadre of initiatives and goals which were not fully developed or implemented with the constant changes in leadership. In 2006, an analysis of the school system's reform efforts by a consulting firm found no progress in student achievement and recommended a change in governance to improve student achievement and system-wide accountability.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The D.C. Committee on Public Education, *Our Children, Our Future: Revitalizing The District of Columbia Public Schools* (Washington, D.C., June 1989). The D.C. Committee on Public Education was formed in 1988 to develop a long-range plan to improve the quality of education provided in the District. The Committee was composed of 64 individuals from the business and professional community, churches, universities, parents, and education experts who worked closely with the Superintendent, Mayor, Board of Education, and D.C. Council in developing the plan.

<sup>11</sup>Council of the Great City Schools, *Restoring Excellence to the District of Columbia Public Schools* (Washington, D.C., January 2004).

<sup>12</sup>The Parthenon Group, *Fact-Base for DCPS Reform* (Boston, London, San Francisco, December 2006).

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**The Reform Act**

In response to the problems facing the District's public school system, 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. The Reform Act transferred the day-to-day management of the public schools from the 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 D.C. public schools was selected by and reported to the Board of Education. The Reform Act also moved the state functions into a new state superintendent's office, established a separate facilities office, and created the D.C. Department of Education headed by the Deputy Mayor for Education. The Deputy Mayor's Office and the state superintendent's office are also cabinet-level offices in the D.C. government structure.



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<sup>12</sup>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.

<sup>13</sup>The State Education Office administered food nutrition programs and state scholarship grants.

<sup>14</sup>The State Board of Education was the Board of Education prior to the Reform Act.

<sup>15</sup>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.

<sup>16</sup>The public charter schools comprised 59 school districts as of March 2009. The charter schools often consist of just one school (some charters have multiple campuses). The Public Charter School Board also has some oversight of the District's public charter schools.

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### Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Although the District of Columbia is not a state, its Office of the State Superintendent of Education serves as the District's state education agency. Prior to the Reform Act, state functions and local functions were conducted in one office which led to problems with oversight and monitoring. Further, the District was and continues to be on the U.S. Department of Education's (Education) high-risk list for its management of federal education grants. The Reform Act addressed such issues by clearly separating the two entities. Along with managing, distributing, and monitoring the use of federal funds across DCPS and the public charter schools,<sup>13</sup> the office of the state superintendent has a significant policy role. For example, the state superintendent's office works collaboratively with the State Board of Education to set standards of what students should learn in all the District's public schools. In addition, in carrying out NCLBA, the state superintendent's office is responsible for the state-wide assessment, or standardized test, that measures students' progress in attaining proficiency and sets annual proficiency targets.<sup>14</sup> The state superintendent's office also delineates requirements for teacher licensure and, within the guidelines provided by NCLBA, determines the District's definition of "highly qualified teachers." In addition to these policy functions, the state superintendent's office also provides support to D.C.

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<sup>13</sup>The District of Columbia has 60 school districts. DCPS is the District's largest school district. The 59 other school districts are public charter schools, and often consist of just 1 school (some charters have multiple campuses).

<sup>14</sup>In the spring, DCPS students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 take the annual end-of-year state test, known as the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System. In addition, DCPS administers the benchmark test, referred to as the D.C. Benchmark Assessment System, district-wide in grades 3 through 10. This test provides DCPS with information on how students are progressing in reading and math in preparation for the end-of-year state test. The District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System was first administered in 2006, prior to the Reform Act.



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public schools and the public charter schools. For example, the office can offer training and technical assistance on a variety of topics, such as the appropriate use and tracking of federal education funds.

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**NCLBA and the Recovery Act**

In January 2002, Congress passed NCLBA which requires states to focus on increased expectations for academic performance and accountability. Under NCLBA, states are required to establish performance goals and hold schools that receive federal funds under Title I of NCLBA accountable for student performance by determining whether or not they have made adequate yearly progress (AYP). The failure to make AYP, or meet academic targets, for 2 or more consecutive years leads to specific actions that schools must take to improve student academic achievement. These actions, such as developing a school improvement plan or extending the school day, are more intensive the longer the school fails to meet academic targets. After 5 or more consecutive years of failing to meet academic targets, a school must make plans to restructure its governance and implement those plans the subsequent year. NCLBA specifies five options for restructuring schools: reopening as a charter school, replacing all or most of the school staff relevant to the failure to make AYP, contracting with another organization to run the school, turning the operation of the school over to the state, or undertaking another action that would result in restructuring the school's governance.

NCLBA also establishes a federal requirement for teacher quality. It requires that teachers across the nation be "highly qualified" in every core subject they teach by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. In general, NCLBA requires that teachers have a bachelor's degree, have state certification, and demonstrate subject area knowledge for every core subject they teach. States also have flexibility to set the requirements that teachers need to meet to demonstrate that they are highly qualified.<sup>15</sup> In March 2008, the state superintendent's office and the D.C. State Board of Education revised the District's highly qualified teacher definition to better align it with NCLBA's definition and allow more teachers to be considered highly qualified. Officials from the state superintendent's office contend that the District's previous highly qualified definition was more stringent

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<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of ways in which states can exercise flexibility, see Department of Education Fact Sheet: New No Child Left Behind Flexibility: Highly Qualified Teachers, March 2004.

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than federal standards and disqualified good teachers from joining the D.C. public school system.

The Recovery Act was enacted in February 2009 to promote economic recovery, make investments, and minimize and avoid reductions in state and local government services. About \$100 billion of the \$787 billion funds included in the Recovery Act are targeted to support education at the state and local level. Some of the Recovery Act funds support existing programs, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by NCLBA, and parts of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In addition, the new State Fiscal Stabilization Fund provides funds to restore state support for elementary and secondary education, public higher education, and early childhood education programs and services. The District will receive an estimated \$148 million of Recovery Act funds to support its education programs.

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#### Pay for Performance Initiatives

The current teacher compensation system used by most school districts in the United States dates back to the 1920s and pays teachers based on their level of education and years of experience. However, many school districts have begun to experiment with alternative methods of compensation that reward teachers on certain elements of performance, such as improving student achievement, filling hard-to-staff positions, and taking on additional responsibilities. Some school districts offer bonuses for all staff or all teachers at schools who have met certain criteria (usually including an increase in student achievement). Other school districts offer differentiated pay to teachers based on characteristics other than education and years of experience. For example, the Denver Public School District has implemented a teacher compensation plan that allows multiple pathways to compensation bonuses. Bonuses can be based on professional evaluations using a standards-based system, progress toward objectives as agreed upon by teachers and their principal, and growth in student achievement on the Colorado Student Assessment Program. Teachers may receive additional incentives for filling hard-to-staff positions. The Denver plan is funded through a tax levy, federal grants, and private funding.

National teachers' unions approve of some types of differentiated or incentive pay. Specifically, the American Federation of Teachers, which is the parent union of the Washington Teachers' Union, has taken the position that teacher compensation plans could include financial incentives to teachers who acquire additional knowledge and skills or agree to teach in low-performing and hard-to-staff schools. In addition, the

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American Federation of Teachers supports incentive pay for school-wide improvement.

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**Early Initiatives Are Focused on Improving Student Achievement and DCPS Is Modifying Its Approach as It Moves Forward**

During the first 2 years of its reform efforts, DCPS implemented several classroom-based initiatives to improve students' basic skills in core subjects and implemented a new staffing model designed to give all students access to art, music, and physical education classes. In addition, as required by NCLBA, DCPS restructured 22 schools before the fall of 2008, after the schools failed to meet academic targets for 6 consecutive years. Restructuring will be ongoing as the vast majority of DCPS schools are in some form of school improvement status under NCLBA. In addition, DCPS and the state superintendent's office are planning and developing new ways to use data to monitor student achievement and school performance. DCPS is refocusing or revising its approach to many of these initiatives as it continues to implement them.

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**DCPS Quickly Implemented Many Separate Initiatives to Improve Overall Student Performance and DCPS Is Refocusing Its Approach as It Moves Forward**

During the first 2 years of reform, DCPS quickly implemented various initiatives intended to improve student achievement. For example, to improve students' basic skills and standardized test scores in reading and math, DCPS introduced targeted interventions for students struggling in math and reading<sup>16</sup> and provided additional instruction and practice to improve students' responses to open-ended questions, including test questions. DCPS also introduced Saturday classes primarily targeted to students in grades 3 through 12 who were on the cusp of meeting academic targets on standardized tests. It also introduced initiatives designed to address student motivation and behavior. For example, DCPS piloted the Capital Gains program with the specific goals of improving student engagement, and ultimately student learning, by offering financial incentives to students for attendance, academic performance, and other positive behaviors. Table 1 provides a list of DCPS's major initiatives to improve student outcomes, as well as descriptions and the status of these initiatives.

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<sup>16</sup>For example, LeapFrog and Read 180 are both reading instruction programs and targeted interventions used to improve basic reading skills for struggling students in the elementary and secondary grade levels.

**Table 1: Status of Major Academic Initiatives during the First 2 Years of DCPS Reform Efforts**

Initiative	How it works	The initiatives target:			School year (SY) initiative was (or will be) launched and status	Being revised
		Reading and math skills	Standardized test scores	Student engagement <sup>a</sup>		
Reading and math interventions	Provides supplemental intensive instruction and practice for struggling students	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	✓
Saturday classes for targeted students	Extends class time on Saturdays primarily targeted to students close to meeting academic targets	✓	✓	✓	SY 2007-2008; ongoing	
Targeted instructional practices	Provides additional practice on answering short answer test questions, using calculators, and playing math games	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	
Pacing guides	Provides guidance to teachers to help focus instruction on what students are expected to know and testing timetable	✓	✓		SY 2007-2008; ongoing	✓
Capital Gains	Offers money to students for attendance, behavior, and academics			✓	SY 2008-2009; may be expanded	
Staffing model	Provides access to art, music, and physical education as well as other supports for all students			✓	SY 2008-2009; ongoing	✓
Teaching and learning framework (planned)	Provides guidance to teachers on how to plan, deliver, and evaluate instruction	✓	✓	✓	Expected to be implemented in SY 2009-2010	

Source: GAO analysis of DCPS documents.

<sup>a</sup>Engaging students in their schooling involves focusing on ways to increase attendance, classroom participation, and other positive behaviors. Such activities may increase student motivation, and eventually may even increase academic achievement.

Recently, the Chancellor acknowledged that DCPS, in its effort to remedy the range of issues that plagued the District's public schools, may have launched too many initiatives at once. The Chancellor noted that some schools may have lacked the capacity to implement so many programs effectively. In particular, some schools were undergoing significant organizational changes that may have affected their ability to implement these new academic initiatives. To support such schools, DCPS is considering offering a choice of programs for schools and allowing the principals to determine which programs best suit their schools' needs and capacity.

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DCPS does not yet know how successful these programs have been in improving student achievement. While DCPS students achieved gains on the 2008 state-wide test, increasing between 8 and 11 percentage points in math and reading for both elementary and secondary levels, it is unclear whether these gains can be attributed to the current reform efforts or to prior efforts.<sup>17</sup> While DCPS officials told us that it is generally difficult to isolate and quantify the impact of any single program on student achievement, they were able to review an analysis of reading scores conducted by the vendor of one of its early reading programs. The vendor's analysis showed that on some tests DCPS students who participated in the reading program generally scored higher than those who did not.<sup>18</sup> Further, DCPS officials told us they plan to analyze, in late summer of 2009, student outcomes, including state-wide test scores, to assess the effectiveness of various interventions.

In addition, DCPS officials told us the success of the math and reading initiatives depended in part on how well teachers implemented them in the classroom. They also noted that there were varying levels of teacher quality and knowledge of effective teaching practices, and that it was difficult to ensure the extent to which teachers implemented the programs effectively. While DCPS had not defined "effective" teaching prior to the rollout of the above initiatives, officials told us that moving forward, they will focus on practicing effective teaching, as opposed to implementing various disparate programs. DCPS is developing a framework that is intended to help teachers understand the priorities moving forward, including understanding what students are expected to learn for each subject, how to prepare lessons, and effective teaching methods to be used. According to DCPS officials, this framework will be aligned to teacher evaluations. DCPS plans to implement this framework by the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year.

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<sup>17</sup>The 2009 state-wide test was administered to students in April 2009 and the test results are expected to be available mid-summer 2009.

<sup>18</sup>After reviewing our draft, DCPS provided us with the results of the vendor's analysis, but we did not independently evaluate the methodology or the results.

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DCPS Encountered Challenges Allocating Teachers across Schools and Is Revising Its Approach for the 2009-2010 School Year

In an effort to ensure that all students would have access to certain subjects and supports, DCPS changed the way it allocated teachers across its schools for the 2008-2009 school year. This new staffing model was intended to provide all schools with a core of teachers including art, music, and physical education, as well as social workers. It also was intended to provide all schools with reading coaches who work with teachers to improve reading instruction. Prior to this change, DCPS allocated funding to schools using a weighted student formula, which distributed funds to schools on a per pupil basis, so that the greater the enrollment of a school, the greater the amount allocated to that school.<sup>19</sup> Principals then chose how to staff the school based on the amount of funding available, staffing requirements, and their perception of the school's needs. Consequently, some schools—especially smaller schools—did not have the student enrollment to support programs,<sup>20</sup> such as music and art, and other schools that had the funds to support those programs opted not to do so. While the new staffing model ensures a core staff at all schools regardless of enrollment,<sup>21</sup> DCPS allowed principals to request changes based on their school's needs.<sup>22</sup> However, DCPS lacked a transparent process for making changes to the staffing allocation. In particular, DCPS did not establish or communicate clear guidance or criteria on how such requests would be treated. Further, DCPS granted or denied requests for changes to the original staffing allocation on a school-by-school basis, and it is unclear whether similar requests were treated in a consistent manner. A more transparent process, one that made public their rationale for decisions, would have helped assure stakeholders, including the D.C. Council, that changes to staffing allocations were made consistently and fairly. The D.C. Council and several community groups have criticized the process for its lack of transparency and questioned the

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<sup>19</sup>In addition to a standard funding amount, students with certain characteristics are funded at greater levels to account for the increased cost of educating them. For example, schools with students who are English language learners and students with disabilities are allocated additional funds.

<sup>20</sup>This issue may have been more acute prior to closing 23 schools due to declining enrollment.

<sup>21</sup>This core can be supplemented with other positions based on enrollment or to comply with laws and regulations applicable to certain student populations, such as students with disabilities and English language learners.

<sup>22</sup>Under the new staffing model, a school may choose to trade a position offered by the new staffing model for another position based on its needs. For example, a school may employ an art teacher funded by a private entity. A principal at such a school could then trade the art position assigned by the staffing model for a regular classroom teacher.

fairness of the decisions made. For example, one independent analysis concluded that some schools received less per pupil funding than others with similar student populations.<sup>23</sup> In addition, DCPS officials told us that in some cases, the changes to the original staffing model resulted in schools being granted allocations beyond their budgeted amounts.

DCPS revamped its approach for the staffing model for the 2009-2010 school year to address some of these challenges. For example, it established guidance about what changes it will allow principals to make to the staffing model and disseminated this guidance to school leaders at the beginning of the budgeting process. According to DCPS, the new guidance is expected to reduce the number of changes that principals request later in the process.

**DCPS Closed 23 Schools Primarily Due to Low Enrollment, Restructured 22 Other Schools as Required by NCLBA, and Is Changing Its Process for Selecting Restructuring Options**

During the summer of 2008, DCPS closed 23 schools primarily due to low student enrollment. Students from the closed schools, about 5,000 students according to DCPS, enrolled in 1 of 26 schools, referred to as receiving schools. DCPS updated facilities at these receiving schools to accommodate the influx of students from the newly closed schools. In addition, to assist these students and schools with the transition that this reorganization created, DCPS offered a more comprehensive version of its staffing model. In addition to the core staff of the standard staffing model, DCPS allocated additional staff, such as school psychologists and math coaches to the receiving schools. During the consolidation effort, DCPS also created several prekindergarten through grade 8 schools in some cases where elementary schools were underenrolled. In addition, according to DCPS, these prekindergarten through grade 8 schools were intended to create a smoother transition to middle school and reduce the number of elementary schools with different grade levels preparing students for the same middle or junior high school. By closing the 23 underenrolled schools, DCPS estimates it was able to redirect \$15 million from administrative and facility costs to support these additional staff. The eight principals we interviewed at receiving schools provided mixed reports about the adequacy of their staffing allocations. On the one hand, three principals reported having adequate staff, and two others cited

<sup>23</sup>Mary Levy, An Analysis of DCPS General Education Resources in Local School Budgets for FY 2009 (Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, December 2006). DCPS officials told us that they conducted their own analysis in an effort to minimize such differences in the future. GAO did not conduct an independent analysis of the per pupil allocations across schools.

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minor issues.<sup>24</sup> The remaining three principals cited issues such as teacher skill levels, teacher vacancies, and inadequate training to accommodate an influx of special education students.

In addition, as required by NCLBA, DCPS restructured 22 of its lowest performing schools for the 2008-2009 school year<sup>25</sup> after the schools failed to meet academic targets for 6 consecutive years. NCLBA specifies five options for restructuring schools, including replacing selected staff or contracting with another organization or company to run the school (table 2 lists the various NCLBA options and the options DCPS selected for the 2008-2009 school year). At 18 of the 22 schools in restructuring, DCPS replaced the school staff—principals, teachers, and/or administrative support staff—who were deemed relevant to the failure to meet academic targets. For the remaining schools in restructuring, DCPS elected to contract with other organizations or undertake other actions, such as adding more intensive school-level services to support students and families.

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<sup>24</sup>In these cases, one principal cited the lack of certification for middle school grades and training on the student data system as problematic for his/her teachers. The other cited a lack of "exemplary" applicants for math and special education. Neither of these two principals reported having vacancies or poor performing teachers.

<sup>25</sup>DCPS reported that in the 2007-2008 school year there were 14,257 students attending schools in restructuring planning status.



**Table 2: Options DCPS Selected for Schools Implementing Restructuring, SY 2008-2009**

Type of school	Option 1: Reopen school as a charter school	Option 2: Replace the staff (which could include the principal) relevant to school not meeting academic targets	Option 3: Contract with another organization or company to operate school	Option 4: Turn operation of school over to the state	Option 5: Implement any other major restructuring of school's governance*
Elementary	0	3	0	0	1
Prekindergarten through grade 8	0	2	0	0	1
Middle school/junior high	0	7	1	0	4
High school	0	6	4	0	2
<b>Total<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

Source: GAO analysis based on DCPS data.

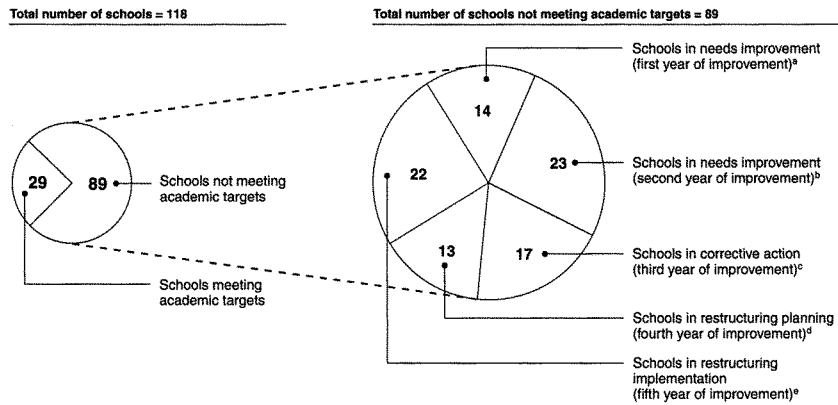
\*These include actions such as adding more intensive school-level services to support students and families.

<sup>b</sup>DCPS selected more than one option for some schools.

Restructuring underperforming schools will likely be an ongoing initiative for DCPS, as 89 of its 118 schools<sup>28</sup> are in some form of school improvement status. (See fig. 2 for more details on DCPS's school improvement status.)

<sup>28</sup>DCPS has a total of 128 schools, but only 118 are required to meet federal accountability standards because these schools do not have students in grades tested under NCLBA, do not have enough students, or have a transient student population.

**Figure 2: Federally Mandated School Improvement Status for DCPS, SY 2008-2009**



Source: GAO analysis based on DCPS data.

<sup>a</sup>Schools in Needs Improvement Status (First Year of Improvement) have missed academic targets for 2 consecutive years. The school district must offer the students in these schools the opportunity to transfer to a higher-performing public school in the district (public school choice). Schools that miss academic targets for the first year are not placed in school improvement status and are not required to undergo any NCLBA interventions.

<sup>b</sup>Schools in Needs Improvement Status (Second Year of Improvement) have missed academic targets for 3 consecutive years. The school district must offer students public school choice or supplemental education services (SES), such as tutoring.

<sup>c</sup>Schools in Corrective Action Status (Third Year of Improvement) have missed academic targets for 4 consecutive years. The school district must implement at least one of six activities such as replacing selected staff or implementing a new curriculum. The district must also offer students public school choice or SES.

<sup>d</sup>Schools in Restructuring Planning (Fourth Year of Improvement) have missed academic targets for 5 consecutive years. The school district is required to plan for a change in governance, such as replacing selected staff or contracting with another organization or company to run the school. The district must also offer students public school choice or SES.

<sup>e</sup>Schools in Restructuring Implementation (Fifth Year of Improvement) have missed academic targets for 6 consecutive years. The school district is required to implement a change in governance. The district must also offer students public school choice or SES.

DCPS revamped its process for determining the most appropriate restructuring option for the 13 schools that will be restructured in the 2009-2010 school year. Prior to implementing the first round of restructuring (i.e., for the 2008-2009 school year), DCPS officials told us

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there were insufficient school visits and inadequate training and guidance for teams assigned to evaluate which restructuring option was best suited for a given school. For example, the initial process called for review teams to visit each school once, which according to DCPS officials, did not allow the teams to obtain sufficient evidence to evaluate the schools' condition. DCPS has addressed these issues by requiring two visits to each school, offering more training, and revising the form used to evaluate each school's condition for the next round of restructuring.

In addition, DCPS officials told us they cannot continue to rely on replacing teachers and principals as the primary restructuring option because DCPS cannot terminate the teachers,<sup>27</sup> and moving these teachers to other schools may undermine the District's reform efforts. DCPS did not assess its capacity for replacing staff at schools restructured in the 2008-2009 school year. According to DCPS, nearly half of the 160 teachers that were removed from these schools had to be placed at 38 other DCPS schools.<sup>28</sup> For the 2009-2010 school year, DCPS has decided to replace select staff at 6 of the 13 schools that will be restructured. (For more details, see the section on teacher and principal quality later in this report.)

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**DCPS and the State Superintendent's Office Are Working to Enhance and Create Data Systems to Monitor Student and School Performance**

DCPS reported it has ongoing and planned initiatives to expand data access to principals and teachers, in part to monitor student and school performance. In particular, DCPS reported it made improvements to its primary student data system<sup>29</sup> so central office users can better monitor school performance. For example, DCPS officials reported that they consolidated several student data systems by February 2009, including the system containing standardized test scores, into the primary student data system with the intent to improve data accuracy and consistency. They also told us they added software to the primary student data system that enabled central office employees to develop monthly reports of schools'

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<sup>27</sup>DCPS could not terminate these teachers due to contractual agreements with the teachers' union. Removal would have required a formal process including teacher evaluation and additional assistance for underperformers. See discussion on the teacher evaluation process later in the report.

<sup>28</sup>The other half of the 160 teachers resigned from the school system or retired.

<sup>29</sup>DCPS's primary student data system is called STARS (Student Tracking and Reporting System). It performs such functions as creating student report cards and tracking student attendance.

performance data, such as attendance and test scores. DCPS plans to eventually use these monthly reports to enable school leaders to better monitor student progress, and plans to develop an internal Web site that compiles various student and school information in one place for key stakeholders including central office staff and principals. However, DCPS officials told us they have delayed some of these efforts while they attempt to improve coordination among the various departments that were developing and disseminating information to school leaders. DCPS has not yet announced when the project will be completed. See table 3 for more details about key DCPS data initiatives and their status.

**Table 3: Status of Key DCPS Data Initiatives**

Initiative	Status
Upgrade software and hardware on primary student data system	Completed summer 2008
Consolidate several data systems into primary student data system	Completed by February 2009
Release school performance data in monthly reports to key stakeholders	Being revised; timeline has not been established
Implement a Web-accessible school-level data system to generate reports on school performance and demographics	Completed October 2008
Launch internal Web site that links to various student and school information for key stakeholders	Expected to be launched late summer 2009

Source: GAO analysis based on DCPS documents and interviews.

The state superintendent's office also is developing a longitudinal database, called the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED) that is intended to allow DCPS and other stakeholders to access a broad array of information, including standardized test scores of students and information on teachers.<sup>30</sup> SLED is intended to allow the District to track student registration and movement among DCPS's schools and the public charter schools more accurately, as well as expand the District's ability to monitor student achievement and growth over time. According to officials in the state superintendent's office, they revised the project

<sup>30</sup>SLED will serve as a unified repository of school system data needed to improve management, reporting, instruction, trend analysis, and program evaluation for the District. SLED is intended to enable the sharing of critical information spanning a student's lifelong public education experience in the District from early childhood to college and other postsecondary education. SLED is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education's Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grants Program. Education's Institute of Education Sciences provides monitoring and technical assistance for the project.

schedule to allow more time to assist the charter schools with updating their data systems. In February 2009, the initial release of student data provided a student identification number and information on student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches and other student demographics for all students attending DCPS's schools and the public charter schools. The state superintendent's office plans for SLED to enable DCPS to link student and teacher data by February 2010. (See table 4 for more details about the status of key SLED deliverables.) This link is to provide DCPS with data on the classes students enrolled in, the teachers that taught the classes, any academic interventions students received, students' grades and test scores, and student demographics.

**Table 4: Status of Key SLED Deliverables**

SLED deliverable	Planned completion date	Completed
Unique student identifier (student ID)	February 2009	✓
Free and reduced-price lunch indicator for students	February 2009	✓
Historical state test scores from 2006-2008 linked to student ID	June 2009	
State test scores from 2009 linked to student ID	July 2009	
Comprehensive student data, including enrollment, grades, and demographics	October 2009	
Link student data to comprehensive teacher data, including unique teacher ID, classes and subjects taught, and certification	February 2010	

Source: GAO analysis based on Office of the State Superintendent documents.

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**DCPS Replaced Teachers and Principals and Introduced Professional Development Initiatives, but Encountered Challenges in Implementation**

DCPS is attempting to improve the quality of its teacher and principal workforce by hiring new teachers and principals and by providing professional development. After the 2007-2008 school year, about one-fifth of the teachers and one-third of the principals resigned, retired, or were terminated from DCPS. However, DCPS officials told us that the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 teacher evaluation process did not allow them to assess whether the teacher workforce improved between these 2 school years. In addition, DCPS introduced professional development initiatives for teachers and principals, but late decisions about the program for teachers led to inconsistent implementation.

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**DCPS Focused on a Workforce Replacement Strategy to Strengthen the Quality of Teachers and Principals, but Is Unsure New Staff Are an Improvement**

DCPS focused on a workforce replacement strategy to strengthen teacher and principal quality. DCPS maintains that the quality of teachers is the single greatest determinant to improving student achievement, and a growing body of research has shown that teacher quality is a significant factor in improving student academic performance.<sup>31</sup> Yet it is often difficult to remove teachers for performance issues beyond their initial, or probationary, years in a given school system. For example, in the 2006-2007 school year, only 1 teacher was removed from DCPS for poor performance out of more than 4,000 teachers. Representatives from the Washington Teachers' Union agreed that there were several poor performing teachers in DCPS, but stated that the 2-year probationary period is the appropriate time to identify and dismiss poor teachers at will.

DCPS began implementing its teacher replacement strategy near the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Specifically, about one-fifth of the teachers and one-third of the principals resigned, retired, or were terminated from the school system at the end of the 2007-2008 school year.<sup>32</sup> DCPS terminated about 350 teachers, approximately 100 of whom were released

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<sup>31</sup>Goe, Laura. *The Link Between Teacher Quality and Student Outcomes: A Research Synthesis*. National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2007. Despite research consensus that teacher quality impacts student achievement, there is not a universal definition of what teacher quality is.

<sup>32</sup>DCPS had about 4,200 teachers for the 2007-2008 school year and about 3,900 teachers for the 2008-2009 school year.

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for underperformance at the end of their probationary period, when tenure decisions were made. The remaining 250 teachers were terminated because they did not meet specified time frames to become highly qualified under NCLBA. An additional 400 teachers accepted financial incentives offered by DCPS to resign or retire in the spring of 2008. A DCPS official told us there is anecdotal evidence suggesting DCPS lost some quality teachers through the contract buyouts, but officials noted that DCPS did not have measures in place to deter effective teachers from accepting the buyouts. In addition, DCPS did not renew the contracts of 42 principals, citing their failure to improve student achievement on standardized tests and to adequately implement school-wide programs.

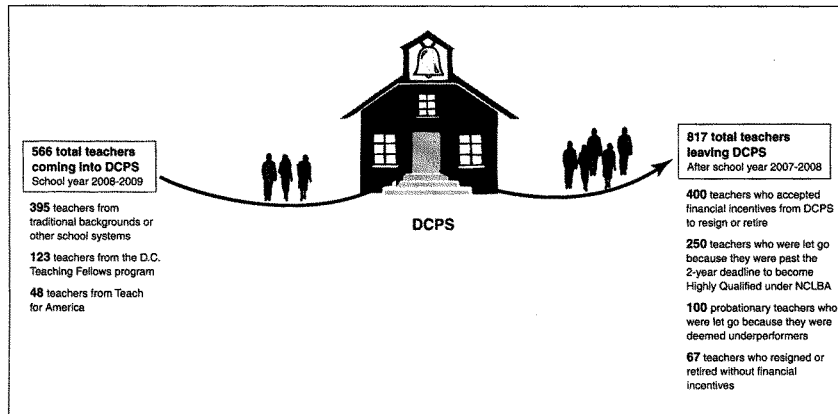
To replace the teachers and principals who left the system, DCPS launched a nationwide recruitment effort for the 2008-2009 school year. DCPS hired 566 teachers and 46 principals for the 2008-2009 school year.<sup>33</sup> Of the 566 teachers, 395 were hired from traditional backgrounds or other school systems and 171 came from nontraditional paths such as the D.C. Teaching Fellows program and Teach for America.<sup>34</sup> (See fig. 3 for more details about the flow of teachers into and out of DCPS between the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.)

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<sup>33</sup>DCPS did not need to hire the same number of teachers as the number who left the school system after the 2007-2008 school year because 23 schools closed and district-wide enrollment had again declined by the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year.

<sup>34</sup>Founded in 1990, Teach for America is a national program that recruits top college graduates and professionals of all academic majors and career interests to commit to teaching for 2 years in urban and rural public schools. Established in 2001, the D.C. Teaching Fellows recruits a range of successful professionals from noneducation fields to teach in DCPS.

**Figure 3: The Flow of Teachers into and out of DCPS between the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years**



Sources: GAO analysis; images, Art Explosion.

However, DCPS did not have a new teacher contract in place due to ongoing negotiations with the Washington Teachers' Union and officials told us this may have hindered their efforts to attract top-quality teachers. The Chancellor has stated that she wants to recruit and retain quality teachers by offering merit pay, which would reward teachers with higher salaries based, in part, on their students' scores on standardized state tests. Under the plan, which has been in negotiation with the Washington Teachers' Union since November 2007, teachers could voluntarily relinquish job protections in exchange for base salaries and bonuses totaling over \$100,000 per school year. This plan relies on over \$200 million in contributions from private foundations to fund the teacher contract, including salary increases and professional development. According to the Chancellor, private foundations continue to pledge their support, even with the current economic downturn. DCPS officials told us the higher annual salaries and bonuses would be sustainable with public funds if private funding is not available when the 5-year contract expires.



**Merit Pay for Teachers across School Systems with Mayoral Governance**

In addition to DCPS, three of the four school systems under mayoral governance we visited—Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City—have implemented financial incentives, or merit pay, to reward teachers for student achievement gains. DCPS, the Chicago Public Schools, and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District all receive Teacher Incentive Fund grants from Education to help fund their merit pay programs. DCPS and the Chicago Public Schools use these grants to reward the entire staff of high-performing schools, including the principal, teachers, and administrative staff. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District also uses the grants to reward all school employees for achieving school-wide goals, but in addition rewards individual teachers for taking on extra duties and assignments while delivering student achievement gains. While New York City did not use federal funding for its merit pay initiative, the school system also rewards the entire staff of high-performing schools.

In addition, an official told us DCPS does not have an adequate means to assess whether its teacher workforce improved between the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years because the current teacher evaluation system is not an effective way to assess teacher performance. Under this evaluation system, principals evaluate teachers' subject matter knowledge, classroom management skills, and adherence to academic standards, among other elements. However, this system does not measure teachers' impact on student achievement, which, according to DCPS, is a key factor in evaluating teacher effectiveness. In addition, according to DCPS, teacher evaluations conducted in prior years did not adequately distinguish excellent from poor performance—almost all teachers received satisfactory ratings. As a result, DCPS officials told us they cannot determine the quality of the 566 new teachers relative to the 817 teachers who left the system.

The current teacher evaluation system remains the primary mechanism for identifying teachers considered ineffective. During the 2008-2009 school year, principals used the evaluation system to place 147 tenured teachers deemed underperforming on 90-day improvement plans. At the end of 90 school days, principals decide whether to retain or terminate these teachers. In prior years, DCPS did not use the 90-day process to this extent.

DCPS plans to revise its teacher evaluation process to more directly link teacher performance to student achievement. The proposed system includes a value-added component that would measure teachers, in part, on their ability to improve students' standardized test scores over the course of a school year. This value-added measure would only apply to about 20 percent of the teacher workforce, since not all grades and subjects are tested. DCPS plans to use a less formal student achievement measure for teachers in nontested grades and subjects in the short term, but is working to increase the number of teachers for whom student achievement growth data are available. In addition, DCPS's proposed evaluation system would add classroom observations by third-party observers, called master teachers, who would be knowledgeable about teaching the relevant subject matter and grade level, to supplement school administrators' observations of teachers. To solicit input on the proposed evaluation system, the Chancellor held a series of sessions in spring 2009 with teachers, teacher coaches, and other school staff, and engaged the Washington Teachers' Union. DCPS officials told us that the feedback was generally positive and that teachers found the proposed evaluation system to be fair, transparent, and an improvement over the current evaluation.

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However, some teachers were concerned about using students' test scores as part of the evaluation.

For the 2007-2008 school year, DCPS revised the principal evaluation system, which holds principals accountable for improvements in students' standardized test scores and achieving other standards. DCPS will be able to use this evaluation system to determine if principals performed better during the 2008-2009 school year than in 2007-2008.

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**DCPS Introduced Teacher Coaches and a Principals' Academy to Provide Professional Development and Improve Skills, but Encountered Challenges in Implementation**

In addition to the workforce replacement strategy, DCPS changed the way in which it develops its teacher workforce. DCPS began placing teacher coaches in schools to help teachers increase student achievement at their workplaces. Previously, DCPS's teacher training was not systematic or aligned with the school district's goals. For the 2008-2009 school year, DCPS hired about 150 teacher coaches to improve teachers' skills in delivering reading and math instruction and boost student test scores.<sup>36</sup> DCPS officials told us their decision to implement school-based teacher coaches was based on research demonstrating gains in student achievement as a result of teacher coaches collaborating with teachers to improve instruction. For the 2008-2009 school year, teacher coaches focused on helping new teachers and teachers with students in grades 3 through 10 in reading and math instruction. For example, teacher coaches, at the direction of principals, assisted teachers with interpreting student test scores, planning lessons, and using their classroom time constructively. DCPS is planning for teacher coaches to work with teachers in all grades and subjects for the 2009-2010 school year.

Late hiring of teacher coaches, however, affected the implementation of the professional development plan for the 2008-2009 school year. DCPS officials told us they made the decision to hire teacher coaches after their review of school restructuring plans in June 2008. DCPS officials told us that, as a result of this late decision, they were unable to adequately recruit a sufficient number of qualified staff to fill these positions. Specifically, qualified teacher coach applicants had accepted jobs

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<sup>36</sup>Qualifications to become a teacher coach include having a valid teaching license, at least 3 years successful teaching experience (5 years preferred), and being deemed highly qualified under NCLBA. In addition, teacher coaches are expected to have successful experience in providing staff development and exemplary presentation, communication, and organizational skills.

**School-based Teacher Coaches Are a Growing Trend in U.S. Public Education**

School-based teacher coach programs are increasingly popular in U.S. school districts. Typically in school-based coaching models, veteran teachers are assigned to provide continuous guidance and advice to teachers to help them improve their instruction. During our Boston site visit, officials told us that Boston Public Schools had partnered with a nonprofit organization to introduce a reading coach program, called Collaborative Coaching and Learning. This program, which was implemented district-wide in 2003, provides in-school, in-classroom support for teachers from coaches skilled in content areas, along with time for teachers to collaborate with one another and the coaches to analyze student data, observe model lessons, try out the model lessons, and reflect on their practices together. According to the Boston Plan for Excellence, it is difficult to analyze exactly how changed teacher practices results in increased student learning. A 2003 study concluded that 2 years after piloting the reading coach program, Boston teachers were reflecting more on their own and each other's work. However, the study agreed that measuring the coaching program's contribution to increased student learning is difficult.

elsewhere, since many school systems recruit staff from February through April.

DCPS intended to staff about 170 teacher coaching positions, however, as DCPS began the 2008-2009 school year, about 20 percent of the coaching positions remained open (19 reading coach vacancies and 16 math coach vacancies). As of late January 2009, there were 157 teacher coaches working on-site in the District's public schools, with 14 total vacancies. Each vacancy represents a school without the full support (either a reading coach or both a reading coach and a math coach) that DCPS wanted to provide. As a result, the ratio of teachers to coaches was higher than it would have been had the positions been filled. In addition, according to DCPS officials and Washington Teachers' Union officials we interviewed, teacher coaches were often unclear on their responsibilities and how to work with teachers, and received some conflicting guidance from principals. For example, these officials told us that some principals did not assign teacher coaches to their intended position. At the beginning of the school year, some principals assigned coaches to cover classes for absent teachers or to evaluate teachers—a practice not allowed under union rules—meaning the coaches were not able to work with teachers.

DCPS is also seeking to improve the quality of principals through the Principals Academy developed for the 2008-2009 school year. Consistent with DCPS's belief that principals should be their schools' instructional leaders, the academy's goals include improving principals' leadership skills, helping them interpret student test scores, and providing advice on how to use this information to improve their schools. The Principals Academy convenes monthly and also includes differentiated professional development workshops based on principals' individual needs.

**The State Superintendent's Office and DCPS Have Developed and Begun Implementing Strategic Plans; However, DCPS Has Not Always Involved Relevant Stakeholders in Planning and Implementing Key Initiatives**

The state superintendent plan is a "state-level" strategic plan that covers the District's public schools (and public charter schools). This plan and DCPS's strategic plan each contain elements GAO has identified as key to an effective plan,<sup>36</sup> such as aligning short-term objectives to long-term goals in order to delineate how to attain those goals. While DCPS has recently increased efforts to involve stakeholders such as parents and the D.C. Council in key initiatives, past stakeholder involvement was inconsistent. DCPS has not yet developed a method for ensuring more consistent stakeholder involvement.

**Both the State-Level and DCPS Strategic Plan Were Developed with Stakeholder Involvement and Contain Many Elements of Effective Plans**

The state superintendent's office and the State Board of Education collaboratively developed the District's state-level, 5-year strategic plan, and released it in October 2008. This state-level plan spans early childhood and kindergarten through grade 12 education (including public charter schools).<sup>37</sup> The plan was developed with stakeholder involvement throughout the process. Officials from the state superintendent's office told us they involved District officials, and stakeholders representing early childhood education, business, and higher education communities, as well as other stakeholders while drafting the plan. In particular, they told us they involved DCPS and the D.C. Deputy Mayor of Education's Office in discussions of the plan. In addition, in September 2008, the state superintendent's office held one public forum to solicit stakeholder input on the draft of the document, and accepted comments on the draft on their Web site. The office released a revised version of the plan within a month of the public forum. Stakeholder involvement in formulating strategic plans allows relevant stakeholders to share their views and concerns. In addition, it affords stakeholders a way to understand the rationale for

<sup>36</sup>GAO, *Agencies' Strategic Plans Under GPRA: Key Questions to Facilitate Congressional Review* (Version 1), GAO-GGD-10.1.16 (Washington, D.C.: May 1997).

<sup>37</sup>The state superintendent's office serves as a state education agency for DCPS and 59 public charter schools, as of March 2009.

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certain decisions. Ultimately, stakeholder involvement can result in increasing stakeholder support, or ownership, of the strategic plan.<sup>38</sup>

The state-level plan details the state-level strategy for improving education in the District and delineates accountability measures for DCPS and the public charter schools. In addition, the state-level plan states the mission, vision, and goals of the agency. It includes three broad, long-term goals: to have all children ready for school, all schools ready to prepare students for success, and all District residents ready to be successful in the 21st century economy. Overall, the plan includes many key elements of an effective strategic plan such as the inclusion of objectives that delineate how the state superintendent's office intends to attain each of its goals. The short-term objectives are supported by various strategies, objective measures, and performance targets. For example, one objective under the goal of having the District's schools ready to prepare students for success is to ensure that all students receive rigorous instruction. This objective is broken down into objective measures, such as the percentage of elementary students scoring proficient or above on the state test. Further, the plan specifies annual performance targets for this objective for the years 2008 to 2013. See table 5 for more details on the elements of the state-level strategic plan.

DCPS released the draft of its 5-year strategic plan in late October 2008. In contrast to the state-level plan which includes the public charter schools, the DCPS plan is specific to prekindergarten through grade 12 education at its 128 schools. DCPS officials told us they based the draft on the Master Education Plan,<sup>39</sup> which the prior DCPS administration developed with stakeholder involvement, and that they sought additional stakeholder input through a series of town hall meetings. After releasing the draft, DCPS held three public forums in the following 3 weeks where attendees provided DCPS officials with feedback on the draft strategic plan. In May 2009, DCPS released the revised draft, which incorporated stakeholder feedback.

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<sup>38</sup>GAO, *21st Century Challenges: Transforming Government to Meet Current and Emerging Challenges*, GAO-05-830T (Washington, D.C.: July 13, 2006).

<sup>39</sup>The Master Education Plan dated February 2006 was developed and released by the Superintendent of D.C. schools and the D.C. Board of Education. According to the plan, there was a high degree of stakeholder involvement in developing the 122-page plan, including five community forums, three forums sponsored by the Washington Teachers' Union, and over 15,000 parents participating through phone surveys.

The DCPS 5-year strategic plan outlines the organization's vision and goals, and includes many elements of an effective strategic plan. For example the plan explains how DCPS's six broad goals are interrelated and how they support the vision. (Table 5 lists the six DCPS goals).

**Table 5: DCPS's Goals, as Outlined in Its Strategic Plan**

1. Compelling Schools: Create schools that provide a consistent foundation in academics, strong support for social and emotional needs, and a variety of challenging themes and programs.
2. Great People: Develop and retain the most highly effective educators in the country, and recognize and reward them.
3. Aligned Curriculum: Implement a rigorous, relevant, college preparatory curriculum that gives all students meaningful options for life.
4. Data Driven Decisions: Support decision making with accurate information about how students are performing and how the District as a whole is performing.
5. Effective Central Office: Provide schools with support they need to operate effectively.
6. Engaged Community: Partner with families and community members who demand better schools.

Source: Making Student Achievement the Focus: A Five-year Action Plan for District of Columbia Public Schools, April 2009.

In addition, the DCPS plan describes the condition of DCPS prior to the reform effort, the progress made to date, and the steps needed to achieve the long-term goals. However, the DCPS plan does not systematically delineate measurable outcomes with clear time frames and does not always identify key external factors that could increase the risk that an initiative may fail. For example, several objectives are aimed at improving teacher quality; however, the plan lacks specific targets for measuring the expected magnitude of such an improvement. Without such targets, it will be difficult for the public to evaluate DCPS's progress toward improving its teacher workforce.<sup>40</sup> In addition, while the strategic plan discusses increased performance-based pay for teachers, it does not specify the cost or explicitly mention the reliance on outside funding streams to achieve the increases.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the reliance on outside funding for the initial 5 years is

<sup>40</sup>The DCPS strategic plan refers the reader to its annual performance plan to see certain performance targets. For example, the fiscal year 2009 performance plan includes projections for student achievement metrics—such as percentage of students who are proficient in math and reading for 2009, 2010, and 2011. Neither the strategic plan nor the annual performance plan has objective measures or performance targets for increasing teacher quality.

<sup>41</sup>The Chancellor has said there is \$200 million in private funding to pay for substantial increases in teacher salaries and professional development.

a risk that is not within DCPS's control. Table 6 contains some key elements of the state-level and DCPS's strategic plans.

**Table 6: Key Elements of Strategic Plans and Their Inclusion in the State Superintendent's Office and DCPS Plans**

Element	State Superintendent's	
	Office	DCPS
Mission statement	Yes	Yes
Long-term goals and objectives	Yes	Yes
Approaches to achieve goals and objectives	Yes	Yes
Description of relationship between long-term goals and annual goals	Yes	Partial <sup>a</sup>
Identification of key external factors that could affect achievement of strategic goals	Yes <sup>b</sup>	Partial <sup>a</sup>
Description of how program evaluations were used or will be used to define or revisit strategic goals	Yes	Yes
Description of stakeholder involvement	Involved stakeholders throughout plan development	Plan based on prior administration's plan and stakeholder input incorporated in revision

Source: GAO analysis of strategic plans.

Note: See GAO/GGD-10.1.16.

<sup>a</sup>DCPS's draft strategic plan delineates goals and explains, with varying degrees of specificity, how it will achieve these goals. These descriptions do not always include specific measures or specific actions.

<sup>b</sup>While the state-level plan includes external factors that could affect its achievement of its strategic goals, GAO did not analyze whether the state-level plan exhaustively lists such factors. However, the DCPS's draft strategic plan discusses increasing teacher compensation and performance-based pay without elaborating on how such increases will be funded, or any conditions of funding.

Officials from the D.C. Deputy Mayor of Education's office told us that as part of their office's coordinating role, it ensured that DCPS and the state-level strategic plans were aligned. However, the office had no documentation showing its efforts to coordinate these plans, such as an alignment study. We found that the two plans were aligned in terms of long-term goals. For example, DCPS's goals could support the state-level goal of having all schools ready. However, we could not evaluate whether more detailed, objective measures and performance targets were aligned

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because the DCPS strategic plan did not always include specific objective measures and performance targets.

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**DCPS Has Recently Increased Its Efforts to Involve Stakeholders in Various Initiatives, However It Has Not Systematically Included Stakeholders**

DCPS officials have several planned and ongoing efforts to involve stakeholders in planning, implementing, and evaluating various initiatives. Stakeholder involvement can be instrumental in these areas because stakeholders can bring different knowledge, points of view, and experiences to planning and implementing reform efforts.<sup>42</sup> DCPS officials told us they have a variety of approaches to involve stakeholders, including parents, students, and community groups, as well as institutional stakeholders such as the D.C. Council. For example, DCPS officials told us they reach out to parents, students, and the public by holding monthly community forums, meeting with a group of high school student leaders and a parent advisory group, responding to e-mail, and conducting annual parent and student surveys to gauge the school system's performance. DCPS introduced monthly community forums in July 2008. These forums were generally informational sessions on topics chosen by DCPS officials, and were followed by questions from the audience. In some cases, such as the three forums focused on the strategic plan, DCPS officials facilitated discussions to elicit feedback. DCPS officials told us their efforts to involve students in reform efforts included a student leadership group that met regarding student concerns, and which was credited by DCPS officials for changes in the school lunch program as well as substantial changes to the discipline policy. DCPS also involved other stakeholders, such as parent organizations and the Washington Teachers' Union in its process of changing the discipline policy. In addition, DCPS officials cited the Chancellor's response to e-mail communications as a form of stakeholder involvement. While such communications may have provided stakeholders with a means of connecting to the Chancellor, e-mail communications are generally not public and do not lead to public debate or discourse.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>GAO-05-830T.

<sup>43</sup>In addition, DCPS officials told us they plan to establish the opportunity for a small group of parents to meet with DCPS officials, including the Chancellor, on an ongoing basis.



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In spring 2008, DCPS also conducted parent and student surveys to assess stakeholder satisfaction with DCPS schools.<sup>44</sup> While DCPS officials told us they have completed the analysis of the parent survey, they have not yet released the results. Further, DCPS did not receive the student survey data until February 2009 due to complications with a vendor who was paid to collect these data.<sup>45</sup> As a result of the delays, DCPS officials told us they have been unable to use student survey responses to inform decisions relevant to the 2008-2009 school year. However, officials said they will be able to use the information as a baseline for future surveys.

However, such activities do not ensure systematic stakeholder input in planning, implementing, and monitoring key initiatives. During our review, DCPS officials told us that stakeholder involvement was important to their reform efforts and that DCPS was taking steps to increase stakeholder involvement. However in some cases, according to two DCPS officials, DCPS did not have a planning process in place to ensure systematic stakeholder involvement, and we found that DCPS implemented some key initiatives with limited stakeholder involvement.<sup>46</sup> For example, key stakeholders, including D.C. Council members and parent groups, told us they were not given the opportunity to provide input to inform DCPS's initial proposals regarding school closures and consolidations, although DCPS did hold numerous meetings after the initial proposal, before finalizing decisions. Similarly, stakeholders told us DCPS did not include them in deliberations and decisions about the establishment of prekindergarten to grade 8 models at some schools. Representatives from one community organization told us that some parents had concerns about the structure and academic setting at the prekindergarten to grade 8

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<sup>44</sup>DCPS conducted a telephone survey and polled 500 parents to assess their satisfaction with their school and the school district as a whole. Parents were asked for feedback on such issues as school safety, quality of instruction, communication, and the level of parental engagement in the decision-making process. The student survey was a voluntary, written survey to assess student views about school safety, services, leadership (principals, teachers, and staff), and instructional practices.

<sup>45</sup>DCPS officials told us they experienced problems with the vendor, such as missed deadlines and incomplete and incorrect data. They also told us several times during the course of our work that they were expecting the data; however, each time the vendor failed to deliver.

<sup>46</sup>After reading the draft of our report, DCPS officials identified four steps they said DCPS takes to involve stakeholders in key decisions. We requested documentation showing that these steps had been in place during the 2008-2009 school year, however, DCPS did not provide such documentation.

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schools, but did not have a venue to express those concerns before decisions about grade configurations were made.

In addition, DCPS did not seek input from key stakeholders during the planning and early implementation of the new staffing model that placed art, music, and physical education teachers at schools and which fundamentally changed the way funding is allocated throughout DCPS. DCPS officials told us that they had not planned for the number of changes that were requested by principals. In particular, they told us that the vast majority of school principals requested changes to their initial staffing allocations. Stakeholders did not have a timely opportunity to raise concerns on the potential risks in implementing the staffing model, such as the uneven distribution of resources across schools and overspending at some schools. Stakeholders also said they were not given sufficient time to review the budget for the 2008-2009 school year or to understand the changes in the budget made after the school year began. DCPS officials told us the budget planning process for the 2010-2011 school year involved stakeholders extensively. In particular, DCPS invited the public to a preliminary budget meeting and also provided training on the budget process to some key stakeholders, such as school principals and community members.

Lack of stakeholder involvement in such key decisions led stakeholders, including the D.C. Council and parents groups, to voice concerns that DCPS was not operating in a transparent manner or obtaining input from stakeholders with experience relevant to the District's education system. Further, these stakeholders have questioned whether the impact of reform efforts will be compromised because of restricted stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders from other urban school districts we visited told us a lack of stakeholder involvement leads to less transparency as key decisions are made without public knowledge or discourse. In addition, the lack of stakeholder involvement can result in an erosion of support for ongoing reform efforts and poor decisions. For example, officials in Chicago and Boston said public stakeholder involvement was critical to community support for various initiatives, such as decisions on which schools to close. Officials and stakeholders in New York cited lack of stakeholder involvement in decisions that were eventually reversed or revised. For example, changes made to school bus routes without consulting parents meant several route changes were later reversed because they proved to be unworkable.

**DCPS and the State Superintendent's Office Have Taken Steps to Improve Accountability and Performance, and DCPS Has Yet to Align Key Aspects of Its Performance Management System to Organizational Goals**

DCPS and the state superintendent's office have taken steps to improve accountability and performance of their offices. For example, both offices have started implementation of new individual employee performance management systems. While DCPS has taken steps to improve accountability and link its individual performance management system to organizational goals, it has not completed this process or used the results of surveys to improve central office operations.

**Both DCPS and the State Superintendent's Office Developed and Implemented a Performance Management System, and DCPS Has Not Yet Aligned Key Aspects of the System to Organizational Goals**

To increase accountability of its central office, DCPS developed an accountability system and an individual performance management system for central office departments and employees. The central office, which is responsible for providing academic and nonacademic supports<sup>47</sup> to DCPS, had operated without such accountability systems prior to the recent reform efforts. For example, previously, performance evaluations were not conducted for most DCPS staff. As a result, central office employees were not held accountable for the quality of services they provided to support schools.

To improve accountability for central office departments, DCPS developed departmental scorecards, as a part of its performance management system, to identify and assess performance expectations for each department.<sup>48</sup> For example, the scorecard for the Office of Data and Accountability includes measures such as the number of users of the

<sup>47</sup>Some central office employees provide academic services, such as planning and monitoring academic initiatives, while others work on nonacademic functions, such as purchasing school supplies and managing teacher payrolls.

<sup>48</sup>Central office departments include the following departments or offices: Chief Academic Officer, Family and Community Engagement, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Office of Data and Accountability, Office of Human Capital, Office of Special Education, Operations, and Transformation Management Office.

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primary student data system. According to a DCPS official, these scorecards are discussed at weekly accountability meetings<sup>49</sup> with the Chancellor to hold senior-level managers accountable for meeting performance expectations. For example, at the accountability meeting we attended, DCPS officials from the Office of Data and Accountability used scorecards to discuss their progress with collecting attendance data and setting up processes to strengthen the collection of these data. According to DCPS officials, some departmental leaders have established similar accountability meetings with their staff, although these are not required.

In January 2008, DCPS implemented a new performance management system for employees. Performance management systems for employees are generally used to set individual expectations, rate and reward individual performance, and plan work.<sup>50</sup> DCPS developed its new performance management system in an effort to improve support services to the schools by improving the accountability and performance of central office employees. In particular, in past school years, teachers complained about not getting paid on time and beginning the school year with inadequate supplies. DCPS's performance management system was put in place, in part, to improve these functions in the central office.

While DCPS developed and instituted a new performance management system, it did not fully align individual performance expectations and evaluations to organizational goals, which GAO has identified as a key practice of effective individual performance management systems.<sup>51</sup> For example, while DCPS took important steps in developing and implementing its system, such as training department managers to set expectations and give feedback to employees, DCPS has not yet established a uniform policy for setting expectations. Further, DCPS has not yet instituted a system to track how and when such expectations are set. Instead, individual managers established processes specific to their

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<sup>49</sup>The Chancellor holds weekly School Stat meetings to hold managers accountable for their offices' performance. School Stat is one of DCPS's accountability programs to track key initiatives and develop strategies to promote continuous improvement.

<sup>50</sup>Effective performance management systems can be used strategically to drive internal change, achieve desired results, and provide continuity during transitions. GAO, *Results-Oriented Cultures: Creating a Clear Linkage between Individual Performance and Organizational Success*, GAO-03-488 (Washington, D.C. Mar. 14, 2003).

<sup>51</sup>GAO-03-488. GAO identified other key practices for effective individual performance management systems. However, we focused on the two practices that link employee performance to the broader organizational goals.

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office or department and, as a result, DCPS could not ensure that individual performance expectations were aligned to organizational goals as outlined in the DCPS 5-year strategic plan or in its annual performance plans.<sup>62</sup> Without such alignment, employees may not be familiar with the overall organizational goals and their daily activities may not reflect these goals. An explicit alignment of daily activities with broader desired results helps individuals connect their daily activities and organizational goals and encourages individuals to focus on their roles and responsibilities to help achieve the broader goals.<sup>63</sup> In addition, as we previously reported,<sup>64</sup> DCPS developed individual performance evaluations in December 2007 as a part of its performance management system in order to assess central office employees' performance. Such individual performance evaluations are used to rate central office employees on several core competencies twice a year. For example, employees are rated on how well they demonstrate a commitment to providing high-quality and timely customer service to both external and internal customers of District schools. Prior to our March 2008 testimony, DCPS officials told us that they intended to align the performance management system with organizational goals by January 2009, and DCPS has taken some steps to improve alignment. For example, DCPS officials told us they had better aligned their departmental scorecards to their 2009 annual performance plan. However, DCPS has not yet explicitly linked employee performance evaluations to the agency's overall goals. DCPS officials told us they plan to link the individual performance evaluations with organizational goals in the summer of 2009 to ensure greater accountability in supporting schools.

The state superintendent's office also implemented a new performance management system, effective October 2008, to hold its employees accountable and improve the office's performance. The office is converting to a single electronic management system to track and evaluate employee performance. This new system, scheduled to be fully operational

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<sup>62</sup>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 ensuring that schools provide a consistent foundation in academics, retaining the most highly effective and compensated educators, and partnering with families and the community.

<sup>63</sup>GAO-03-488.

<sup>64</sup>In our March 2008 testimony, we reported that DCPS officials told us that employee evaluations do not yet link to their offices' performance goals because they had limited time to implement the new performance system. However, officials stated that they planned to develop the linkages over the next year. GAO-08-549T.

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by December 2009, will replace the two separate systems that had operated on different cycles. According to an official from this office, the new system is uniform, user friendly, and allows for an easier transfer of performance information from manager to employee. In addition, this system links individual employee evaluations to overall performance goals and the office's strategic plan. Under this new evaluation system, each employee is given a position description, which includes responsibilities and duties linked to the overall goals, mission, and vision of the state superintendent's office. Individual and agency expectations are defined in an annual performance meeting with the employee. The office is currently training supervisory employees on how to use the system before its full implementation in December 2009.

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**DCPS Surveyed Staff at Schools to Measure Satisfaction with Central Office Services; However, DCPS Has Not Yet Used Survey Results to Improve Operations**

In November 2007, DCPS conducted a survey of employees within District schools, including teachers and principals, to gauge satisfaction with District services, including central office services during the 2007-2008 school year. Personnel at the schools are key stakeholders in improving central office functions, and their feedback is important to help DCPS ensure resources are targeted to the highest priorities.<sup>55</sup> The American Institutes for Research partnered with DCPS to administer the online survey of teachers, principals, aides, clerks, counselors, project directors/coordinators, related service providers, and other staff. They were asked to provide feedback on numerous topics, including the work environment, facilities and maintenance, professional development, and leadership, as well as central office services. With regard to central office services, the survey's questions were focused on personnel services, budget and procurement services, district departments and support services, food and nutrition services, and technology and data.

Of those staff that completed the survey,<sup>56</sup> more were satisfied with their schools, such as their work environment and fellow staff members, than with the support system provided by the central office. For example, they were least satisfied with the central office's ability to provide goods and services in a timely manner, compute paychecks accurately, and allot budgeted funds when needed. In addition, staff who completed the survey were least satisfied with facilities office's responsiveness to requests for

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<sup>55</sup> GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, GAO/GGD-96-118 (Washington, D.C.: June 1996).

<sup>56</sup> A total of 3,285 staff completed the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 55 percent.

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school repairs, saying they were not completed in a timely manner. DCPS officials told us the results of the survey were shared internally with different central office departments in 2008, and focus groups were formed within a month of the release of the survey results to develop specific action plans to address identified issues. However, DCPS officials were unable to provide us with specific examples of improvements made in central office operations as a result of the survey. Three of the eight principals we met with regarding the school consolidation process stated that they could not always access budgeted funds when needed. In addition, four of the eight principals noted that school repairs were not made in a timely manner.<sup>67</sup> One principal told us his payroll was often inaccurate, and some teachers were not always paid on time. DCPS officials told us another staff survey will be administered in spring 2009.

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## Conclusions

The challenge of reforming DCPS is daunting. NCLBA requires 100 percent proficiency by 2014 and the District's students scored significantly lower than the District's own proficiency targets for 2008 and below students in most other urban districts. In the past, support for reform efforts has waned as student achievement did not improve, as buildings deteriorated, and as new superintendents were ushered in every few years to address these problems.

The need for rapid reform and results is acute and the District's Mayor and his education team have taken bold steps—such as implementing various classroom-based initiatives, reorganizing schools, and replacing teachers and principals—to improve the learning environment of the District's students and ultimately increase student achievement. However, DCPS lacks certain planning processes, such as communicating information to stakeholders in a timely manner and incorporating stakeholder feedback at key junctures, which would allow for a more transparent process. In addition, DCPS did not gauge its internal capacity prior to implementing certain key initiatives, which, if addressed in the future, could help ensure the sustainability of initiatives. Without these planning processes, an organization risks having to revamp initiatives, leading to delays and compromising the implementation of timely, critical work. While having these planning processes in place will not eliminate all implementation issues, it will help to identify and mitigate risks associated with

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<sup>67</sup>We met with eight principals during our review that received students from closing schools to discuss DCPS's consolidation process.

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implementing bold initiatives and identify needed changes in the early stages of the initiative. Furthermore, a lack of these planning processes can result in decisions that are made on an ad hoc basis with resources unevenly distributed as was the case with the District's new staffing model. Ultimately, the lack of such processes while planning and implementing initiatives has impeded the success of some of DCPS's initiatives and could impede the District's continued success and progress in reforming its school system.

Stakeholder consultation in planning and implementation efforts can help create a basic understanding of the competing demands that confront most agencies and the limited resources available to them. Stakeholders can then share their expertise and experience, and views on how these demands and resources can be balanced. Continuing to operate without a more formal mechanism—other than community forums or e-mails—for stakeholder involvement could diminish support for the reform efforts, undermine their sustainability, and ultimately compromise the potential gains in student achievement. As more initiatives are developed, the need to balance the expediency of the reform efforts with measures to increase sustainability, such as stakeholder involvement, is critical.

In addition, since the Reform Act, the District has taken several steps to improve central office operations, such as providing more accountability at the departmental level and implementing a new individual performance management system. However, DCPS has not taken steps to align its performance management system, including its individual performance evaluations, to its organizational goals, which could result in a disparity between employees' daily activities and services needed to support schools. By ensuring that employees are familiar with the organizational goals and that their daily activities reflect these goals, DCPS could improve central office accountability and support to schools.

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### Recommendations to the Mayor of the District of Columbia

To help ensure the transparency, success, and sustainability of the District's transformation of its public school system, we recommend that the Mayor direct DCPS to establish planning processes that include mechanisms to evaluate its internal capacity and communicate information to stakeholders and, when appropriate, incorporate their views.

To strengthen the new individual performance management system and ensure greater accountability of central office employees in their role



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supporting schools, we recommend that the Mayor direct DCPS to link individual performance evaluations to the agency's overall goals.

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### Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DCPS, the Deputy Mayor of Education, and to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education for review and comment. These offices provided written comments on a draft of this report, which are reproduced in appendix I. They also provided technical comments, which we incorporated when appropriate. All three entities concurred with our recommendations. However, they expressed concern with the way in which we evaluated their reform efforts and the overall tone of the draft report.

Specifically, District officials stated that we did not measure DCPS's progress in terms of the condition of the school system prior to the reform efforts, but instead measured progress in terms of whether the ultimate goals of the reform efforts had been met. We disagree. We did not measure DCPS's progress against "ultimate goals." As is now reflected in the paragraph describing our approach to this study, we measured the progress of ongoing reform efforts by comparing DCPS's progress to its own time frames for implementing various initiatives. In conducting our review, we spoke with numerous DCPS officials and repeatedly asked for documents and time frames in order to objectively gauge the District's progress. In some cases, DCPS officials did not provide us with such documentation; however, we made a concerted effort to accurately identify current initiatives and related time frames. In addition, we measured completed initiatives against recognized standards. For example, we determined whether or not the DCPS and the state-level strategic plans contained elements that GAO has identified as key to an effective plan.

In addition, we described the conditions that existed prior to the reform efforts in order to provide context to the steps DCPS has taken. For example, we noted that prior to the reform efforts, DCPS's teacher training was not systematic or aligned with the school district's goals and that DCPS is now offering on-site professional development to improve teacher skills. We also cited the lack of individual performance evaluations for central office employees prior to the reform efforts that DCPS has made to improve in this area. Furthermore, we made every effort to provide balance and objectivity in our findings. For example, some stakeholders, such as parents groups, union representatives, and the D.C. Council, told us that DCPS made key decisions without their involvement. We revisited

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this issue with DCPS officials and described several of their efforts to improve stakeholder involvement in the initial draft of our report.

We visited four urban school districts with mayoral governance and conducted in-depth interviews to help us better understand the magnitude of the challenges that officials encountered while trying to reform their school systems. We also spoke with superintendents and officials from mayors' offices in these districts about the key lessons they learned as they reformed their school systems, including the risks associated with not having systematic stakeholder involvement.

Finally, the District's education offices stated in their response that we characterized the state superintendent's efforts as positive and those of DCPS more negatively. While drafting this report, we intentionally avoided any comparison between DCPS and the state superintendent's office, as their tasks and challenges are dissimilar. After reviewing our draft, DCPS provided us with more information and documentation regarding efforts to involve stakeholders in the development of the October 2008 draft of the DCPS strategic plan and steps taken to introduce alignment of accountability measures to organizational goals. We made changes to our report to reflect the updated information.

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As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the D.C. Mayor's Office, relevant congressional committees, and other interested parties. Copies will also be made available upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site <http://www.gao.gov>.

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If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or [ashbyc@gao.gov](mailto:ashbyc@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.

*Cornelia M. Ashby*

Cornelia M. Ashby, Director  
Education, Workforce and Income Security Issues

## Appendix I: Comments from the D.C. Mayor's Office and District Education Offices

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



June 11, 2009

Cornelia M. Ashby  
 Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues  
 United States Government Accountability Office  
 441 G Street, N.W., room 5940  
 Washington, DC 20548

Subject: "District of Columbia Public Schools" June 2009 Report  
 to 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

Dear Ms. Ashby:

We write in response to the draft June 2009 GAO report on the progress of the District of Columbia Public Schools reform efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report and provide feedback to you and your team. We believe we have made substantial progress with our reform efforts, but agree that there is still much work to be done. We have significant concerns, however, with the tone of the draft report and the approach used to reach the conclusions presented, and hope that these are addressed through a revised final report.

The report represents the conclusion of nearly two years of ongoing evaluation and analysis by the GAO of District education reform efforts since the District established a new school governance model that placed control of the school system under the authority of the Mayor. Overall, we agree with the substance of the two major recommendations from the report: 1) that DCPS establish planning processes that include evaluating internal capacity and incorporating stakeholders at key junctures and 2) that DCPS link individual performance evaluations to the agency's goals to strengthen accountability for DCPS' central office. As we have shared with the GAO team, the Mayor has made constant evaluation, stakeholder input, and alignment of evaluations with objectives central components of ensuring accountability under the governance structure.

We disagree strongly, however, with the overall tone of the draft report and the conclusions derived within specific sections. The report falls short of objectively conveying the context for the DCPS initiatives underway and of adequately capturing all of the progress that has been

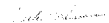
**Appendix I: Comments from the D.C. Mayor's  
Office and District Education Offices**


made to date. The findings presented attempt to measure DCPS against a fully implemented reform standard, even though the reform has been underway for only two years. In order to "evaluate the District's reform efforts", as the report describes GAO's charge from Congress, we believe it is more appropriate and accurate to measure DCPS in terms of what has been accomplished since the passage of the Public Education Reform Act, rather than measuring the work in terms of whether all of the ultimate goals have been fully accomplished to date.

The draft report does not adequately present the whole picture, and throughout the draft report, the section headings appear to be designed to include a negative finding as a requirement, even when the text describes areas of significant overall achievement. Moreover, in areas where both DCPS and the Office of the State Superintendent are similarly situated, the draft report describes the progress made at OSSE in more balanced way by focusing on improvements planned in the future, rather than gaps in initial efforts. At DCPS, the discussion centers instead on what DCPS has not yet done.

In finalizing the June 2009 report, we ask that the GAO attempt to address the issues outlined above in order to present a clearer, more balanced assessment of where we are in our reforms. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback, and have provided your staff with a list of technical corrections and improvements. We strongly believe in evaluation and assessment, and we want to be held accountable to the public for our work. We hope that the GAO report can be used as a tool not only for Congress, but the public at large, to measure our success.

Sincerely,

  
Victor Roldano  
Deputy Mayor for Education

  
Michelle Rhee  
Chancellor, DCPS

  
Kerri Briggs  
State Superintendent

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## Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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### GAO Contact

Cornelia Ashby at (202) 512-7215 or ashbyc@gao.gov

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### Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Elizabeth Morrison, Assistant Director; Nagla'a El-Hodiri, Analyst-in-Charge; Sheranda Campbell; Jeff Miller; and Vernetta Shaw made significant contributions to this report in all aspects of the work. Susan Aschoff, Mark Bird, Timothy Case, Bryon Gordon, Jeffrey Heit, Janice Latimer, Jean McSween, Sandy Silzer, and Sarah Veale provided analytical assistance. Doreen Feldman and Sheila McCoy provided legal support and Lise Levie and Kimberly Siegal verified our findings.

BACKGROUND  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS:  
TAKING STOCK OF EDUCATION REFORM  
July 23, 2009

**Background**

DCPS were created in 1804. Congress vested control of DCPS in a nine-member Board of Education (BOE) through a new “Organic Act” of June 1906. The D.C. Supreme Court appointed the Board members, who were required to be District residents and who served without compensation for three-year terms. In 1968, the District of Columbia Elected Board of Education Act changed the BOE to 11 elected members, eight of whom represent specific city wards and three of whom represent the city on an at-large basis for four-year terms.<sup>1</sup> This governance model remained in place until it was replaced by District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment of 2007 (Reform Act).<sup>2</sup>

A series of reports over the past twenty years have documented problems with the DCPS System and efforts at reform.<sup>3</sup>

- 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);<sup>4</sup> and
- DCPS Master Education Plan and Master Facilities Plan (2006).<sup>5</sup>

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, which highlighted a number of problems identified in the five previous reports, including the need to 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.<sup>6</sup>

The central recommendation to accomplish 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. The study suggested four reasons for shifting to mayoral governance:

1. DCPS is in a state of emergency requiring an immediate turnaround strategy;

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.k12.dc.us/about/history.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> D.C. Law 17-0009. <http://www.dccouncil.us/lms/legislation.aspx?LegNo=B17-0001&Description=DISTRICT-OF-COLUMBIA-PUBLIC-EDUCATION-REFORM-AMENDMENT-ACT-OF-2007.&ID=18038>.

<sup>3</sup> *Fact-Base for DCPS Reform*, The Parthenon Group, Boston, London, San Francisco (December 2006), available at [http://www.dc.gov/mayor/DCPS\\_Reform\\_report.shtm](http://www.dc.gov/mayor/DCPS_Reform_report.shtm).

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.cgcs.org/pdfs/DCPSReportFinal.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Available at: [http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/documents/MEP\\_final.pdf](http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/documents/MEP_final.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Supra* note 3.

2. Slow progress in spite of consistent visions for reform during 20 years of underperformance;
3. A complex governance structure 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.<sup>7</sup>

The Pantheon study helped build the case for the Mayor's proposal to take over the failing school system from the BOE. In 2007, the D.C. City Council passed the Reform Act (D.C. Bill 17-0001), transferring management and oversight authority of the DCPS from the BOE to the Mayor.<sup>8</sup> The Reform Act established DCPS as a cabinet-level agency administered by a Chancellor who is the Chief Executive Officer of DCPS and is directly accountable to the Mayor. The legislation also established a Department of Education to be headed by a Deputy Mayor for Education, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the D.C. Council. The Department of Education has oversight of four subordinate entities: the State Education Office, the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, the Office of Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission.<sup>9</sup>

Congress passed and the President signed the necessary legislation to amend the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to conform the District charter to the Reform Act.<sup>10</sup>

Mayor Adrian Fenty then announced the nominations of Michelle Rhee, then Executive Director of the New Teachers Project, to be Chancellor of DCPS;<sup>11</sup> Alan Lew, then Chief Executive Officer of the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission, to head the Office of Facilities Modernization;<sup>12</sup> and Victor Reinoso, then 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.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Reinoso was confirmed by the Council on October 2, 2007.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Legislative text available at: <http://www.dccouncil.us/images/00001/20090505154855.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> H.R. 2080, which became Public Law No. 110-33 on June 1, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See for Rhee nomination: <http://www.wtopnews.com/index.php?nid=316&sid=1165054>.

<sup>12</sup> See for Lew nomination: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/13/AR2007061301923.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Rhee nomination, see <http://www.dccouncil.us/lms/legislation.aspx?LegNo=PR17-0318&Description=CHANCELLOR-OF-THE-DISTRICT-OF-COLUMBIA-PUBLIC-SCHOOLS-MICHELLE-RHEE-CONFIRMATION-RESOLUTION-OF-2007.&ID=18786>; Lew nomination, see <http://www.dccouncil.us/lms/legislation.aspx?LegNo=PR17-0317&Description=DIRECTOR-OF-THE-OFFICE-OF-PUBLIC-EDUCATION-FACILITIES-MODERNIZATION-ALLEN-LEW-CONFIRMATION-RESOLUTION-OF-2007.-&ID=18785>.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.dccouncil.us/lms/legislation.aspx?LegNo=PR17-0319&Description=DEPUTY-MAYOR-FOR-EDUCATION-OF-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-EDUCATION-VICTOR-REINOSO-CONFIRMATION-RESOLUTION-OF-2007.&ID=18787>.



**Prior Hearings on Progress of Reform Efforts**

On July 19, 2007, shortly after Mayor Fenty assumed control of DCPS, the OGM Subcommittee 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 hearing examined the Mayor's implementation plan, performance expectations, and methods to ensure accountability as he moved forward with education reform. While the D.C. government 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 DCPS.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of the first hearing and in order to track the progress of the reforms, Senators Akaka and Voinovich requested GAO undertake two studies: a short-term study after the first six months of the reform effort, and a long-term study after the first two years of the reform efforts.

On March, 4, 2008, after GAO completed its short-term study, the OGM Subcommittee held a hearing entitled *On the Path to Great Educational Results for the District's Schools?*. In its short-term study, GAO focused on: the separation of the State office functions and the local education office, reforms at DCPS, reforms to the facilities and the office of facility maintenance, and establishing accountability throughout the system. The report found 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 worked to develop teacher licensing, address No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) compliance, reform the special education system, and address early childhood literacy programs.
- Chancellor Michelle Rhee released proposals to consolidate unused space in schools, expand effective programs, invest in teacher training, hire approximately 50 new principals, and establish new academic priorities.
- The Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization worked to reduce the number of work orders outstanding and improve the system for principals to request work.<sup>16</sup>

GAO's central recommendation for the education system was to develop a long-term system-wide strategic plan. According to GAO, it is critically important in a system requiring significant transformation and improvement that a transparent, living strategic plan be developed and used to guide those efforts. Since that hearing, OSSE and DCPS have developed strategic plans that align; however, the Deputy Mayor for Education still lacks a strategic plan and has yet to commit to developing one.

<sup>15</sup> S. Hrg. No. 110-241, July 19, 2007. See all District of Columbia witnesses' prepared statements at 39-65. Available via <http://www.gao.gov/congress/senate>.

<sup>16</sup> *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*, Government Accountability Office, GAO-08-549T, March 14, 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08549t.pdf>

**Results of the Long-Term GAO Report on the Status of Reforms**<sup>17</sup>

In its long-term study that is being released at the hearing, GAO examined steps the District has taken to (1) address student achievement; (2) strengthen the quality of teachers and principals; (3) develop long-term plans and involve stakeholders; and (4) improve accountability and performance of DCPS and the State Superintendent's central office.<sup>18</sup> GAO's report contains two recommendations: DCPS should establish planning processes that include evaluating internal capacity as well as involving stakeholders at key junctures, and DCPS should link individual performance evaluations for central office employees to organizational goals to strengthen accountability.<sup>19</sup>

**Student Academic Achievement**<sup>20</sup>

During the first two years of its reform efforts, DCPS focused its attention to three areas: (1) classroom-based initiatives; (2) school restructuring and compliance with the NCLBA; and (3) new data monitoring for student achievement and school performance. These initiatives have yielded improvement in student test scores. In 2008, DCPS elementary and secondary school students increased math and reading achievement by eight to 11 points on D.C.'s annual District-wide test, the Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) exam.<sup>21</sup> The 2009 CAS scores showed continued improvement in math and reading for elementary and secondary school students.<sup>22</sup>

**Classroom-Based Initiatives**<sup>23</sup>

DCPS's classroom-based initiatives to improve student achievement included numerous programs as well as a reallocation of teachers across schools. DCPS initially undertook six major initiatives to help struggling students:

- (1) **Reading and math interventions**: Targeted instruction in reading and math;
- (2) **Saturday classes**: For students on the cusp of meeting academic targets on standardized tests;
- (3) **Targeted instructional practices**: Math games and short-answer test practice;
- (4) **Pacing guides**: Teacher guidance to focus instruction on tested subjects;
- (5) **Capital Gains Program**: Pays students for attendance, behavior, and academic achievement; and

<sup>17</sup> *District of Columbia Public Schools: Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability*, Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-619, July 23, 2009, <http://www.gao.gov/>. NOTE: The report is not yet released, but it is available to Committee staff by request.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at "Highlights" page.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 11-21.

<sup>21</sup> See DCPS Press Release, *District of Columbia Public Schools See Significant Gains in DC CAS Scores*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.k12.dc.us/media/documents/DC%20CAS%20Press%20Release.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> See DCPS Press Release, *Fenty, Rhee and Reinoso Announce DCPS 2009 DC CAS Scores*, July 13, 2009, <http://www.k12.dc.us/media/pressreleases/Press-Release-July-13-2009-Fenty-Rhee-Reinoso-Announce-DCPS-2009-DC-CAS-Scores.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-619, *supra* at note 17, at 11-15.

- (6) Core Staffing Model: “Core staff” are required at all schools, regardless of student enrollment, to ensure that all students have access to subjects such as art and music. Principals can, however, request changes based on the school’s needs.<sup>24</sup>

These initiatives have been received with mixed results. A lack of clear guidance and transparent processes lead to criticism from the D.C. Council and community groups that staffing decisions and resource allocations were unequal and unfair. DCPS has addressed these concerns by issuing guidance expected to reduce the number of changes that principals request later in the process and to increase transparency and consistency.

According to GAO, DCPS has acknowledged that it may have launched too many initiatives at once, which may be rectified by allowing principals to determine which programs best suit their schools’ needs and capacity. DCPS does not yet have data on the effectiveness of each intervention; however, GAO and DCPS both acknowledge the difficulty of isolating the effect of any one intervention.

*NCLBA and School Restructuring*<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 2008, DCPS closed 23 schools due primarily to low enrollment, and restructured 22 of its lowest performing schools as required by NCLBA. Roughly 5,000 students were reassigned from the closing schools to one of 26 renovated “receiving” schools that were given additional staff and resources to accommodate the reassigned children. During the consolidation effort, DCPS also created several pre-kindergarten through grade 8 schools to address under-enrolled elementary schools and create a smoother transition to middle school. At 18 of the 22 schools, DCPS replaced the school staff members who were deemed relevant to the failure to meet academic targets. DCPS elected to contract with other organizations or exercise other NCLBA approved options for the remaining schools in restructuring.

After closing and structuring these schools, the 2009 CAS scores show a four percent decrease in the number of schools that have achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP), a measure used by Federal officials to determine progress under NCLBA, despite some achievement gains.<sup>26</sup>

*Data Monitoring*<sup>27</sup>

In order to effectively collect, use, and distribute data, DCPS and OSSE have undertaken efforts to enhance and create data systems to monitor student and school performance. DCPS has completed software and hardware upgrades, consolidated several data systems into a primary student data system, and implemented a web-accessible, school-level data system to generate reports on school performance and demographics. DCPS is still working on initiatives to release school performance data monthly and to launch an internal website linking student and school information.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 15-19.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Turque, “D.C. Schools Show Progress on Tests,” *Washington Post*, July 14, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/13/AR2009071301476.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-619, *supra* at note 17, at 19-21.

OSSE also is developing the State Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED), a longitudinal database to allow DCPS and other stakeholders to access an array of information including standardized test scores of students and information on teachers. This system is expected to be fully functional in February 2010.<sup>28</sup>

#### Quality Teachers and Principals<sup>29</sup>

According to GAO, DCPS primarily undertook a workforce replacement strategy to strengthen the quality of its teachers and principals. This resulted in approximately one-fifth of all teachers and one-third of all principals resigning, retiring, or being terminated from the school system at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. To replace these teacher and principals, DCPS launched a nation-wide recruitment effort for the 2008-2009 school year, resulting in the hiring of 566 teacher and 46 principals. Because of an inadequate teacher assessment system, DCPS is unable to determine whether this action has improved the workforce. DCPS is in negotiations with the teachers' union to develop a new evaluation system that includes teachers' impact on student achievement and may include a financial incentive system.

In addition, DCPS introduced teacher coaches and a Principals' Academy to improve its education workforce. Teacher coaches focused on assisting new teachers and improving teaching of third through tenth grade reading and math. DCPS wanted to hire 170 coaches, but a late start on hiring limited the number of coaches for the 2008-2009 school year to 150. For principals, the Principal's Academy convenes monthly to provide instruction and workshops on leadership skills, test score interpretation, using data to improve school performance, and other topics.

#### Long-Term Planning and Stakeholder Involvement<sup>30</sup>

Both the OSSE and DCPS have developed and begun implementing strategic plans, the absence of which was a criticism in GAO's short-term report on the reforms. In this longer-term study, GAO found that both the OSSE's "State-level" strategic plan and DCPS's plan contain elements that GAO has identified as keys to an effective plan such as aligning short-term objectives to long-term goals in order to delineate how to attain those goals. In addition, GAO notes that both plans were developed with stakeholder involvement; however, it found that DCPS does not systematically include key stakeholder involvement.

DCPS's strategic plan outlines six goals:<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 22-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 28-34.

<sup>31</sup> Making Student Achievement the Focus: A Five-Year Action Plan for District of Columbia Public Schools (April 2009 working draft), <http://www.k12.dc.us/chancellor/documents/DCPS-Five-Year-Action-Plan-Working-Draft-April-2009.pdf>.

1. Compelling schools: Create schools that provide a consistent foundation in academics, strong support for social and emotional needs, and a variety of challenging themes and programs.
2. Great People: Develop and retain the most highly effective educators in the country, and recognize and reward them.
3. Aligned Curriculum: Implement a rigorous, relevant, college preparatory curriculum that gives all students meaningful options for life.
4. Data Driven Decisions: Support decision making with accurate information about how students are performing and how the District as a whole is performing.
5. Effective Central Office: Provide schools with the support they need to operate effectively.
6. Engaged Community: Partner with families and community members who demand better schools.

#### Accountability and Performance of Central Offices<sup>32</sup>

Both the OSSE and DCPS have taken steps to improve accountability and performance in their offices. Both offices have implemented performance management systems, including individual employee performance and department performance. GAO, however, noted that DCPS has yet to fully align individual employee performance expectations and evaluations to organizational goals. In addition, GAO found that the results of an employee satisfaction survey, which found a relatively low level of satisfaction with the services of the central office, had not been used to improve the operations of the central office.

#### Conclusion

While reform efforts do appear to be taking root, much improvement is still needed to ensure DCPS student performance continues to make progress. By implementing GAO's recommendations to systematically include stakeholder input and link teacher performance to long-term goals, DCPS will strengthen the foundation for its education reforms.

#### 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>
- Public Law No: 110-33, 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.

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<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 35-39.

**Additional Resources**

- *District of Columbia Public Schools: Important Steps Taken to Continue Reform Efforts, But Enhanced Planning Could Improve Implementation and Sustainability*, Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-619, July 23, 2009, <http://www.gao.gov/>
- *Making Student Achievement the Focus: A Five-year Action Plan for District of Columbia Public Schools*, District of Columbia Public Schools, April 2009, <http://www.k12.dc.us>
- *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*, Government Accountability Office, GAO-08-549T, March 14, 2008, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08549t.pdf>
- 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/>
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**Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce and the  
District of Columbia**

**Hearing on "D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform"  
July 23, 2009**

**Questions and Answers for the Record  
Submitted from Michelle Rhee, Chancellor, D.C. Public  
Schools**

1. The D.C. Public School (DCPS) system has a program called "Capital Gains" that provides financial rewards to students for good grades, behavior, and attendance. Does this program contain a financial literacy component to help students learn to manage the money they are earning? If so, please describe it.

Chancellor Rhee's Response: Yes, the Capital Gains program has a financial literacy component. The Capital Gains program is working with the Financial Literacy Foundation and Junior Achievement during the 2009-2010 school year to provide monthly workshops for students. The workshops cover information about the program, as well as budgeting and saving skills. Pre- and post-tests are used to assess student understanding of the material covered in each session.

2. Recruiting, training, and retaining good employees are important to the success of any organization. DCPS has hired many teachers, principals, and other employees during its reforms.

A. How is DCPS ensuring the successful recruitment, training, and retention of staff?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: We know that for great teaching to flourish, our schools must be led by the best instructional leaders in the country, supported by the highest quality school-based and central office staff, and provided with the appropriate resources and professional development. Our goal is to ensure that every adult in the district holds student achievement as their number one priority and is working tirelessly to ensure that nothing stands in the way of our students' success.

With those beliefs in mind, we are working diligently to ensure that we:

- attract and select high-caliber candidates to DCPS,
- create the conditions where great people can be successful,
- offer first-rate professional development opportunities,
- provide rigorous and robust evaluations,
- reward those who excel, and
- fairly transition-out those who are ineffective or unqualified.

B. Are there key positions that remain unfilled within DCPS? Please identify the position(s) and describe the reasons for these vacancies.

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The positions listed below were the school-based positions vacant on the first day of school. Historically, DCPS has always had vacancies at the start of the school year, but this year the number is much lower than average.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Positions Vacant</b>
Special Education	10
Instructional Coach	2
Elementary	3
Music	2
Secondary Science	2
Bilingual/ESL	2.5
Social Worker	1
Art	1
Spanish	2
Secondary Math	1.5
Health and Physical Education	0.5
Librarian/Media Spec.	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

3. The GAO report released at the hearing states that DCPS officials are planning to implement a new teacher evaluation process linking teacher performance and student achievement, relying on standardized test scores as a measure of achievement. Because not all grades and subjects are tested, how will you evaluate the remaining teachers?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: Teachers who teach grades or subjects that are not tested will be measured on the following:



- The teacher's instructional expertise as measured by 3 observations from an administrator and 2 observations from a Master Educator (impartial, subject-based expert practitioner);
- His/her students' growth as measured by something other than the state assessment (e.g., Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), textbook exams, portfolios);
- His/her commitment to the school community; and
- The growth of the entire school on the state assessment.

4. DCPS spends a considerable amount of money on contracts and has at times struggled with contract oversight.

A. What specific steps is DCPS taking to improve contract management and oversight?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The District of Columbia Public Schools, Office of Contracts and Acquisitions (OCA) requires all schools and program offices to complete a performance evaluation when procuring goods or services equal to \$100K or more. The performance evaluation is completed by the Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR). The COTR is trained and certified and is appointed by the Contracting Officer to manage the contracts and supervise and evaluate the contractor's performance.

Additionally, OCA is working to improve cost efficiency on our contracts by working closely with the U.S. General Services Administration to maximize our use of its negotiated schedules and by hiring a cost analyst to work with our contract specialists.

We are, also, reducing the use of sole source contracts and re-competing contracts after the base year to ensure we get the best pricing for services and goods.

B. How is the new Chief Operating Officer involved in these activities?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The Office of Contracts and Acquisitions reports directly to the Chief Operating Officer.

5. It has been two years since the D.C. Public Education Reform Act took effect. Now that you have had experience with the law, are there any changes you would recommend?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 included a provision for a review after 5 years to determine whether the new governance structure has been effective. We strongly support using the full 5-year term to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts and do not support any changes to the law at this time. We are confident that we

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have the right governance structure in place. We must have time to implement reform efforts and allow those reforms to take hold and create the change we are seeking.

6. DCPS recently released preliminary Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) scores for the 2008-2009 school year, which reflect continued improvements in math and reading among DCPS students. However, the percentage of schools making adequate yearly progress decreased from last year. Please provide your assessment of why that is.

Chancellor Rhee's Response:

As a result of the significant gains made on the 2008 DC-CAS, most of our schools started from a much higher baseline in 2009. To make AYP, many of the schools had to show a percent increase on top of the gains from the previous year. Some of these schools made gains but fell short of the percent increase required to make AYP. As a result, the total number of schools making AYP fell in 2009.

Across the District, schools experienced challenges maintaining AYP progress; 27% of DC public schools made AYP in 2009 down from 31%, and 18% of the public charter schools made AYP in 2009 down from 31%. Overall, we are encouraged by the continued growth on the DC-CAS, and moving forward we would like to see our schools both maintain and reach their AYP targets.

7. DCPS plans to turn 13 of its schools into "catalyst schools" that develop specialized curriculum around themes such as science, arts, and languages.

A. Why was this decision made, how did you determine which schools would develop which themes, and what benefits do you believe it will provide students and the school system?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The DC Catalyst Project was designed as one strategy for achieving the goal of "Creating Compelling Schools" as referenced in the DCPS five-year plan. Schools were chosen through a thoughtful application process during the spring of 2009 in which schools submitted applications describing their preliminary vision and indicating which theme most interested their staff and communities. Adopting a school-wide theme will enhance individual schools by fostering active and engaging classrooms, providing a common direction and focus for the school community, affording an opportunity to develop meaningful partnerships with theme-relevant community organizations and corporations, and increasing student achievement across the content areas. Within the District, Catalyst schools are well poised to pilot programs that could later be scaled out beyond these 13 schools, and to become "hubs" from which best practices in each theme can be shared with other schools.

B. The Government Accountability Office's (GAO) report suggests that DCPS may have undertaken too many reform initiatives at once. How will you ensure that developing catalyst schools does not detract attention from other important reform initiatives?

Chancellor Rhee's Response:

The Catalyst schools, like all other schools, will be evaluated through the Quality School Review process which will ensure that the school's theme is working in concert with other reform initiatives to increase student achievement. Furthermore, by having a dedicated theme at the Catalyst schools we are better able to focus our support to make certain that the school's programs are fully integrated.

C. DCPS has indicated that it was developing an "effective teaching" framework to determine which initiatives fit within the focus on effective teaching and help teachers understand DCPS priorities. How does the catalyst school initiative fit into the effective teaching framework, and will you be using the framework to gauge the effectiveness of this new initiative?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: The Catalyst Project is inherently aligned to the DCPS Effective Schools Framework in that its underlying goal is to produce effective schools as defined by the framework and its components address the impact of a school-wide theme on the six elements of the framework. The organizations providing professional development for teachers will also be briefed on the DCPS Teaching & Learning Framework, and will be expected to explicitly communicate the sections of the framework that the new instructional strategies promote.

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

**Hearing on "D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform"  
July 23, 2009**

**Questions for the Hearing Record Senator Roland Burris**

8. Academic achievement and extracurricular involvement are important factors in keeping kids away from gangs and violence. Certain security measures can enhance the safety of the schools, but parents and teachers have the biggest impact on keeping children away from these dangerous activities. What initiatives have been implemented that extend beyond the classroom and promote greater parental involvement in student achievement? How have these initiatives worked? Have you seen any decrease in violent school-related incidents under the new structure?

Chancellor Rhee's Response: As a foundation for our reform efforts at the district level and in our schools, DCPS created the Effective Schools Framework. As part of the framework, we identified what we believe to be the six key elements of an effective school. We have identified "Safe and Effective Learning Environment" and "Family and Community Engagement" as two of these key elements, and as you note in your question, the two elements are often times deeply intertwined.

DCPS believes that parental involvement is so important that we are now evaluating our principals, in part, based upon the job they do engaging their school communities. We offered sessions to principals to build their overall community engagement plans and to learn about best practices for investing parents in their students' education.

On top of the initiatives DCPS has put in place to reduce violent school-related incidents, we believe that increased parental and community engagement will make our schools safer places for our students. At this point in time, however, it is too early to determine how the parental involvement initiatives have affected the number of violent incidents.

9. The GAO report indicated that further improvements in the schools could be made. This is true of any school system you look at, regardless of test scores, college admissions, and other similar metrics. What improvements have been most important to the success of the DC public schools and students? Are there any initiatives that you would recommend to other school districts for implementation?

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**Chancellor Rhee's Response:** From overhauling data systems and building a culture of accountability to improving operations, facilities, and instruction, DCPS reforms are interconnected in a way makes every initiative necessary. However, the core of district-wide improvement centers on our human capital strategy to retain, recruit, and reward a high performing and results-driven staff. After an aggressive recruitment campaign to seek the highest quality principals across the country, we replaced 49 principals for the 2008–2009 school year and 26 for 2009–2010, and new principals went on to outpace the district in student academic growth. After inheriting a central office in which staff had been here for many years without clear expectations or performance reviews, we instituted a process for regular performance assessments. As a result, we began to see a shift to a culture of accountability for results.

The most important work to drive instructional reforms is coming to fruition this year through a new Teaching and Learning Framework that will support teachers toward high achievement. The Framework clarifies what research and experience tell us good teaching looks like, and it is aligned to a new performance assessment for teachers that will allow us to measure student academic growth by teacher. Last year's planning work to create it, the new master educator position to implement it in schools this year, along with increases in the quality and consistency of professional development for teachers, have all been some of the most critical reforms to date.

Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Dr. Kerri Briggs, Acting State Superintendent of Education  
From Senator Daniel K. Akaka

“D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform”  
July 23, 2009

1. Recruiting, training, and retaining good people are important to the success of any organization.
  - a. How are you ensuring the successful recruitment, training, and retention of staff within the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)?

*Our office provides recruitment trainings for managers six (6) times a year, focusing on the recruitment process and human resources requirements within the District government. Our Human Resources department also provides general support to staff so that they are able to actively recruit talented individuals for the right positions at OSSE.*

*In recent months, we provided trainings on ethics as well as diversity to all OSSE employees and received positive feedback on their impact. As new data systems become available and policies become effective, we will provide training as necessary. Finally, we intend to provide additional trainings in the future, such as an operational organization training that will benefit everyone in their daily work.*

*Regarding retention, we are optimistic about improvements in the retention of OSSE employees. We intend to change the culture so that our employees can feel confident in the direction of the agency and their engagement and involvement in the process.*

- b. Are there key positions that remain unfilled in OSSE? If so, what are the reasons for these vacancies and what steps are you taking to fill them promptly with highly-qualified candidates?

*A number of key positions remain unfilled, including: the Director of Transportation, the Director of Assessment and Accountability, and the Chief Operating Officer position. We are actively working to fill these positions as quickly as possible but we need to make sure we are selecting strong, highly qualified individuals to meet the demands for these positions. Overall, OSSE is working diligently to identify, recruit and retain staff, as we know the importance of having qualified, capable staff to improve our capacity. This remains on-going work that I take very seriously. For the time being, interim staff is continuing to do the work for these three key positions.*

2. It has been two years since the D.C. Public Education Reform Act took effect. Now that you have had experience with the law, are there any changes you would recommend?

*The Public Education Reform and Amendment Act of 2007 (PERAA) does a good job of separating local and state responsibilities—this clarity did not exist before PERAA. As we better understand our role as the SEA for the District, we are making changes to local education regulations to specifically outline what OSSE’s responsibilities are and what our role in education reform will be.*

3. What are your top three priorities for moving forward with D.C. public school reform in the 2009-2010 school year?

*Since I started, my top priorities have been, and continue to be, our high-risk designation from the US Department of Education, improving the quality of special education in the District, and improving the quality and reach of data systems.*

*As the state education agency for the District, we are responsible for receiving, distributing and monitoring the use of federal funds. In the past, OSSE did not meet all of its responsibilities as the SEA. The distribution of and accounting for federal funds is vital. I echo Senator Voinovich’s concerns expressed during the hearing. I am very cognizant of DC’s designation a high-risk grantee and am committed to working with the US Department of Education to ensure the proper systems and protocols are in place so that we become better stewards of federal dollars.*

*Special education is my second priority. My commitment to improving the quality of education and services for this group of students is shared by the Mayor, the City Council, and the local school districts. Two of the biggest concerns for the District are transportation and nonpublic schools, both of which cost the District a sizeable amount of money. By improving the quality of special education for children in DC schools, we will not incur the cost to transport and pay for tuition for students with disabilities at nonpublic schools. These savings would allow us to spend additional funding toward improving instruction and raising student achievement.*

*The final critical element is the development of a data system that provides timely, accurate data. Currently, we have two major data system initiatives underway. The first is the Special Education Data System (SEDS), which allows us to track the movement of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The second is the Statewide Longitudinal Education Database (SLED), which tracks the mobility of students throughout the District. The ability to track students will allow us to better share information across the state and between DC Public Schools and our large number of charter schools, permitting us to provide better services and improve instruction for our students.*

**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Cornelia Ashby  
From Senator Daniel K. Akaka**

**“D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform”  
July 23, 2009**

- 1. It will take a number of years to fully turn around the D.C. public school system, which has been underperforming for decades. What protocols or processes has DCPS put in place to ensure that the current education reform efforts move forward over time, including after Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee are no longer in office?**

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) instituted some processes and protocols, including a 5-year strategic plan and a new accountability structure, which can provide successive District administrations with some key tools to continue the current education reform efforts. However, there are additional steps that DCPS could take, such as institutionalizing the role of stakeholders in the planning process in order to increase community support of both current and future reform efforts.

DCPS has articulated its vision for education reform and has taken steps to institutionalize greater accountability across all aspects of its school system. In its 5-year strategic plan, DCPS laid out its goals for improving the school district and identified the necessary steps to achieve these goals. Strategic plans can help guide successive administrations as they continue to implement long term reforms. Such plans can also provide measures of progress over time and gauge whether the District is achieving success. DCPS also developed and implemented an accountability system that includes departmental scorecards which are discussed at regular accountability meetings with the Chancellor. These scorecards and accountability meetings provide a mechanism for gauging specific reform efforts by holding senior level managers accountable for progress made and identifying areas that need further attention DCPS also undertook efforts to consolidate and update its multiple data systems to facilitate access to data for principals, teachers, and DCPS administrators. Increased access to data can strengthen accountability and lay the foundation for data driven decision making.

However, there are additional steps DCPS needs to take to improve the likelihood that these reform efforts will be continued. As stated in our report, DCPS lacked certain planning processes, such as protocols for regular stakeholder involvement. Strong community and stakeholder support for and ownership of initiatives would increase the likelihood that initiatives are sustained beyond the current administration. In addition, DCPS could benefit by documenting its process and rationale for making decisions. Such documentation could increase transparency and provide future DCPS administrations with a roadmap of specific reform efforts taken, or not taken, and why. The lack of documentation regarding DCPS reform efforts extends to the Deputy Mayor for Education’s office, which has yet to produce a strategic plan or document its role in coordinating efforts between DCPS and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.



**Post-Hearing Questions for the Record  
Submitted to Ms. Cornelia Ashby  
From Senator Roland W. Burris**

**“D.C. Public Schools: Taking Stock of Education Reform”  
July 23, 2009**

- 1. I understand that GAO looked at the Boston, Cleveland, New York, and Chicago public school districts because each of these districts is under mayoral governance. How has your examination of these school districts impacted your assessments of the District’s progress under the current structure? How does the District’s progress currently compare with the progress of these other school districts two years into their reforms? Were you able to determine whether the other school systems were meeting their goals and benchmarks on schedule? Based on what you saw in these other school districts, what can the D.C. public school system learn from other cities that have mayoral control?**

During our review of the education reform efforts underway in District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), our site visits to other school districts with mayoral governance helped us scope our job and focus on the extent of stakeholder involvement. Our visits to Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York enhanced our understanding of the challenges and successes faced under mayoral governance of school districts. We found that the school districts we visited had experienced various successes and setbacks with their reform efforts, and the impact of some reform efforts on student achievement was not always immediate. In addition, districts had distinct approaches to reform and experienced different types of success. Consequently, we determined that DCPS’ reform efforts could not be measured against those of other districts. To the extent possible, we used DCPS’ internal metrics and timeframes to evaluate the progress of ongoing initiatives. Our site visits also increased our awareness of the importance of stakeholder support of the reform efforts. Education leaders in all four cities told us that it was critical to involve stakeholders in the reform efforts and all had mechanisms in place to ensure systematic stakeholder involvement. In our report, we noted that while DCPS had taken a variety of steps to involve stakeholders, some key decisions were made without stakeholder feedback. We recommended that DCPS establish protocols regarding the involvement of stakeholders in its planning processes.

We asked officials from the four cities if they could identify “lessons learned” or advice for the DCPS reform leaders, and their answers generally focused on stakeholders, accountability, and prioritizing reform efforts. Union representatives and community groups told us that under mayoral governance there was a risk that some stakeholders could feel removed from the decision making process. To mitigate this risk education leaders noted that it was important to reach out to a wide array of stakeholders and build trust through various strategies. One strategy for doing so was to develop a long-term strategic plan with stakeholder involvement and to communicate the plan to all stakeholders. Another strategy was to reach out to the business community in an organized and efficient manner in order to sustain interest and promote long term commitments. Yet another strategy mentioned was to have a strong outreach effort to

ensure public support prior to any action or position taken by a school board. During our site visits, some officials told us it was important to bring the unions along in the reform efforts, as they can be powerful allies in instituting reform. Officials acknowledged that involving stakeholders in a meaningful way would take time and resources, but also said that stakeholder buy in would help promote and sustain reform efforts.

Education leaders also focused on accountability. They noted that prior to the reform efforts, no single person was held accountable for the school district, and that under mayoral governance, the mayor was held accountable. Education leaders in these districts told us that it was necessary to have a mayor dedicated to education in order to bring about rapid and meaningful reform. In addition to mayoral accountability, education leaders told us it was also important to have central office accountability to ensure the system worked well and to promote transparency. Finally, education leaders told us that in approaching reform, it is important to identify specific priorities, provide resources to address these priorities, and bring about tangible results in these areas.

We did not assess the progress of these school districts at the two-year point and thus were unable to compare their progress to that of DCPS. In addition, we did not determine the extent to which the site visit school districts were meeting their goals and benchmarks on schedule.

**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce,  
and the District of Columbia  
Get Back for Dr. Kerri Briggs  
July 23, 2009**

**1) What is the current status of the District of Columbia's efforts on early childhood education?**

The Early Childhood Education office (ECE), a division of the Office of State Superintendent (OSSE), provides leadership and coordination to ensure that all District of Columbia (DC) children from birth to kindergarten have access to high quality early childhood development programs. ECE develops an effective early childhood education system by implementing high standards for programs and professionals, creating supports to meet standards, adhering to rigorous accountability measures, engaging community stakeholders and securing strong financial supports.

In FY09, the ECE budget was \$96.6M. The largest portion of the budget (\$81M) is spent on administrating the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). As you are aware, the CCDF is a federal program to assist low-income families in obtaining child care so they can work or attend training/education programs. The fund includes the vouchers provided by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. OSSE serves as the lead agency charged with administering the CCDF.

With this money, DC provides child care services to children from birth to age 12 (and to age 18 for children with disabilities). Children are served by community-based providers, faith-based providers and employer-sponsored providers. In 2009, the Child Care Subsidy Program served a total of 19,927 children or 63.3% of the 31,500 eligible children in the District.

The ECE's second largest initiative is its pre-k programming (budgeted at \$5.1M for FY09). In 2008, the DC Council passed the *Pre-K Expansion and Enhancement Act* (known as the Pre-K Act), making ECE responsible for the implementation of high quality universal pre-k in DC. The pre-k program uses a multi-pronged approach to early childhood education that utilizes DC Public Schools, DC public charter schools, and community-based organizations, providing parents with a wide breadth of pre-k options.

FY09 was the planning year for the Pre-K Act and program implementation will begin in FY10. During the planning year, OSSE conducted a Baseline Quality Study and a Capacity Audit, developed High Quality Program Standards, and worked with the State Board of Education to pass the Early Learning Standards (Infant – Pre-K). OSSE currently supports pre-k services for 368 students. The services include high-quality classrooms for the students, professional development and training for the staff, and child outcome assessments for policy-makers. In FY10, funding from the Pre-k Act will become available and OSSE hopes to expand services to 600 students. Expansion is

possible, in part, because community based-organizations will qualify (for the first time) for the per pupil public funding formula. The goal of the Pre-K Act is to provide universal access to high-quality pre-k to all District residents by 2014.

**2) Does the District of Columbia receive funding for early childhood education through Title I?**

Title I Part A is allocated to states based upon the number of elementary and secondary students living in poverty. Preschool students are not a part of the District's definition of elementary and secondary education. Therefore, the District's pre-kindergarten students do not generate Title I funds. Local Education Agencies may, however, serve pre-k students with Title I Part A funds, but they do not receive any money based upon that student population.

**3) What percentage of Head Start money comes from local and federal dollars?**

Head Start funds are given directly from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Head Start Bureau, to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies. OSSE manages the DC Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) with an annual budget of \$125,000. The office does not have oversight of Head Start/Early Head Start programs nor does it act as a fiduciary agent. HSSCO:

- Facilitates collaboration between Head Start/Early Head Start agencies and entities that carry out other activities designed to benefit low income children
- Acts as the liaison for Head Start/Early Head Start agencies and OSSE.
- Promotes better linkages between Head Start agencies, including agencies that provide health, mental health, or family services to children birth to five years old.
- Works in partnership with the State-based Training and Technical Assistance Systems, Statewide Service Area Committees, and the State Early Learning Council.
- Assists Head Start agencies with curricula alignment and assessment implementation.

In FY09, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services allocated \$25M to DC Head Start programs. Below is a list of the organizations and students served:

<b>HEAD START PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT (2007-08)</b>			
<b>Center Name</b>	<b># Early Head Start Children</b>	<b># Head Start Children</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Bright Beginnings	N/A	46	46
Department of Parks and Recreation	N/A	154	154
DC Public Schools	8	1,782	1,790
El Centro de Rosemount	106	193	299
Edward C. Mazique PCC	84	122	206
United Planning Organization	N/A	657	657
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>2,954</b>	<b>3,152</b>