



D.C. POLICY
CENTER

PUBLIC HEARING ON

**BILL 22-776, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EDUCATION
RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD AND
COLLABORATIVE ESTABLISHMENT AMENDMENT
ACT OF 2018**

Before the Committees of the Whole and Education
Chairman Phil Mendelson and Councilmember David Grosso

July 13, 2018 at 10:30am
John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin
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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmember Grosso and members of the Council. My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. I thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Bill 22-776 correctly highlights the need for better data, stronger internal and external controls at schools, and research that can improve education practices in the District. But the bill has one major flaw: It will place all these functions under the Office of the Auditor. While both audits and research are critical to guide education policy and practice in the District of Columbia, when combined, the research will fail.

To be clear, there is great need for more external controls at District's education entities given revelations over the last year about overreporting of graduation rates and underreporting of disciplinary actions at schools. The Auditor is already positioned to investigate these under its current mandate. This office should receive adequate funding to do so and the District of Columbia's education agencies should receive adequate resources, both financial and technical, to comply with audit requests.

But the research aspect---what the bill calls the research consortia—should be independent, and separated from the government, and therefore does not belong in the Auditor's office. An independent research-practice partnership—the

commonly used name for research collaboratives—that generates scientific research is necessary to identify paths for continued improvements. The research-practice partnership needs to focus on information schools need and be completely separate from audits or politics. **Successful research-practice partnerships like those in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York, have buy-in from practitioners and trust of the schools and education entities where they conduct research.** They collaboratively choose research topics, have an advisory board that focuses on scientific merit, and rely on external funding from foundations or federal sources instead of just the city budget. In addition, many partnerships are hosted by a research institution or a university with a deep bench of academic researchers and expertise in cleaning, managing, and storing large datasets.

The District of Columbia should also integrate lessons learned from previous education research-practice partnerships in the city. For example, since 2011, **DCPS has partnered with researchers at University of Virginia and Stanford University** to examine the effect of IMPACT and now LEAP. DCPS, DC PCSB, and OSSE have also shared data with the Urban Institute to study **transportation to school** and Mathematica Policy Research to study **school choice in D.C.** In 2012, a group of researchers formed the D.C. Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (**EdCORE**) based at George Washington University as a partnership between independent research firms and university-based faculty. EdCORE released **five reports** on D.C.'s 2007 school reform, known as PERAA. The Auditor served as the fiscal agent for EdCORE's work, which was mandated by the Council. DCPS and OSSE

were compelled to provide data to the study and were not partners in the effort. Without strong agency buy-in and consistent financial support, EdCORE became dormant when its commissioned work ended.

Looking at successful research-practice partnerships outside of D.C., the proposed research collaborative differs in ways that weaken its

independence. It would be the only one to have an oversight and audit role in addition to carrying out research, and the only one where elected officials can directly request studies by policy. It is also unique in that it receives all of its funding from the city instead of grants from federal sources and foundations. Lastly, it doesn't incorporate a research institution or university as a partner or on its Advisory Board.

What are the characteristics of other research-practice partnerships?					
Characteristic	D.C. (proposed)	Massachusetts	Chicago	New Orleans	New York City
Are some datasets made available to the general public?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Can independent researchers (non-affiliated) access the data?	No	Yes	No	No	No
Does the data sharing agreement require individual project approval?	No*	Yes	No	No	No
Does the research partner conduct audits or oversight?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Do elected representatives directly shape the research agenda?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Does funding come from the city's budget?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Is the research partner housed by a research institution or a university?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Are research institutions or universities represented on the steering committee?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Mandated data sharing with Office of the Auditor
Source: Review of organizations' websites and outreach.

Rigorous collaborative research can inform how educators and policymakers improve their practice; independent audits can empower oversight over such

decisions—both functions are sorely needed, but best kept separated. If these two functions are combined, schools will be reluctant to participate in research wrapped up as audit and oversight. The research agenda will be shaded towards compliance rather than learning lessons for improving D.C. education outcomes. Unfortunately, the Council’s proposed path will undermine the role of research in examining what works and what positive paths D.C. can build towards providing every student with an excellent public education.

Thank you very much for your time, and I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.