



**Testimony of Naomi Rubin DeVeaux  
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**Hearing on Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and the  
Implementation of Reform Initiatives  
Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education  
April 4, 2019**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, councilmembers, and staff, thank you for inviting us to testify today as we continue this important conversation about truancy, attendance, and chronic absenteeism. I am Naomi Rubin DeVeaux, Deputy Director of the DC Public Charter School Board.

Starting with the positives, we are seeing improvement in two important attendance measures for the charter sector:

- In-seat attendance is up from this time last year, to 92.5%
- Chronic absenteeism is down by 0.5% from this time last year, to 22.8%.

However, when it comes to truancy, the charter sector's truancy rate is now 11.0%, up 0.8 percentage point from last year to date. This increase has been consistent throughout the school year and is disappointing to us.

At our board meeting last month, the Board issued the first notice of concern of the school year to an elementary school for exceeding the truancy threshold we set in our Attendance and Truancy Policy. The elementary school in question had a truancy rate of 37.6%. At that March meeting, our board members asked many probing questions to understand why their rate is so high. The school's leadership shared that the school is further from public transit

than any other school and transportation is a major barrier for attendance for many of their students. The school is working on implementing weekly attendance reports to families and has made their before school program free and open to all students.

At that same board meeting, DC PCSB did not issue a notice of concern for another public charter school that had also exceeded the truancy threshold for the 37 students at the school who are under 18. Goodwill Excel Public Charter School's testimony and evidence showed they have invested heavily in improving student attendance. Specifically, the school has worked with their psychologist to improve social-emotional supports, used incentives for attendance, and improved relationships with students and other stakeholders. Goodwill Excel's current truancy rate of 51% is more than a 20 percentage-point improvement from their rate last year. Their focus was recognized by the Every Day Counts! Taskforce for being the most improved school.

As a member of the Every Day Counts! Taskforce, we continue to work with city agencies on efforts to improve school attendance. In the public charter school sector, there has been an increase in the number of referrals to Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) this school year over this time last year. However, we have heard from schools that there is no communication on these referrals after they are received by CFSA. This lack of communication means schools are not able to either support CFSA's efforts or provide alternative supports for students, if needed. We hope CFSA's educational neglect triage unit is able to build capacity to further improve the feedback they provide public charter schools around referrals.

Prior to CFSA referrals, public charter schools are using other interventions including Show Up, Stand Out (SUSO) and Parent and Adolescent Support Services (PASS). The feedback we and schools receive from those programs could be improved. In fact, to date we have received only one page of information from SUSO: a list of public charter schools they were working with and the engagement rates with their community-based organization partners for the first three months of this school year. Our data team has requested information on

students engaged with SUSO and their community partners so that we could analyze the impact on student attendance. SUSO has never provided raw data or analysis on attendance outcomes for public charter school students who have been engaged. Our goal is to understand if these community based organizations, and the case management provided by SUSO, is actually improving attendance.

Regarding PASS, as we mentioned in January, we have an active data sharing agreement, and they have asked for information for two students, which we have shared with them. Ultimately, we would like PASS to share data on attendance outcomes for students who participate in their program. We hope bringing these communication issues to light will encourage more feedback and data sharing between DC PCSB and these agencies and programs.

At the previous roundtable on this topic, we offered some possible solutions to the issue of truancy and chronic absenteeism. This included a suggestion for a citywide transportation initiative. Today, you heard from some school leaders who are providing transportation to their students and what the costs and benefits are to those services. I would like to expand on what they shared, including the work our staff has done on this issue.

While gathering information about school transportation programs, we found 9 public charter schools that provide transportation services to some or all of their students. These services are provided either as bus routes with stops at student homes or at designated sites or through shuttles from metro stations or bus stops. Of the public charter schools that are providing transportation, most contract with transportation companies that assume all liability. Other public charter schools have elected to purchase buses or passenger vans to run their own service. This requires additional insurance, staff and training, and logistical support.

The number of students who benefit from these services and the cost varies widely by school. However, schools shared they currently have the capacity to provide these services to

all students who want to participate in their transportation program. Attached to my written testimony is a table with more information about individual schools.

In addition, over 20 school leaders have looked into providing transportation but found that the cost was prohibitively high. One school leader shared, “busing is one of our biggest expenses, only accounting for athletics and field trip travel.” Another school previously provided transportation for their families but had to discontinue the program, explaining that, “it took a lot of staff time to register students to use the bus, communicate with parents and bus company, resolve issues that came up on the bus, provide bus monitors.... It was not sustainable.” We have been told from school leaders that the cost for busing to be between \$3,000- \$4,000 per student per year.

Many public charter schools would be interested in participating in a citywide transportation initiative. We looked at some of the efforts already taking place at a city level to support student transportation to and from school. Currently, a student transportation program for students living on Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (JBAB) is being run through the Navy. The School Liaison Officer at JBAB shared some of the student demographics, logistics, and lessons learned with me. This program buses 300 students a day to 32 traditional and charter schools through a contract with DC Tours. These bus routes use 12 busses and have about 20 designated stops for student pick up and drop off. The cost of this program is more than one million dollars a year for the Navy, which echo the cost concerns of school leaders. Per student, per year, this program costs more than \$3,600. JBAB also shared that they require parents to sign a bus contract with clearly outlined consequences for bus behavior. They also said it is critical to the success of this program for another adult, in addition to the driver, to be on board to act as a monitor, which adds to the cost. They also mentioned that, due to traffic, arrival times can vary drastically from day to day. We suggest that the city partner with JBAB to analyze the bus patterns, cost, and family satisfaction.

We are at the early stages of gathering information from schools with the plan to analyze attendance data for the impact of transportation has on individual students. Some schools have anecdotally reported an increase in student attendance because of their programs. Our hope is this will help schools and city agencies decide which students could benefit from targeted support through transportation.

We will continue this important and urgent work to address truancy and attendance issues. Thank you for continued support of these efforts. We look forward to sharing more of what we learn about transportation and other solutions as the work and this conversation continues. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Public Charter Schools Providing Student Transportation

Public Charter School	Program	Cost	Students
Carlos Rosario International PCS	Purchased vehicles that are run and maintained by the school, 6 stops in NW 1050		1050
The Children's Guild PCS	Contracts with Alliance Transportation to offer 10 routes across the city with 3-5 stops	\$90,000 monthly	500
IDEA PCS	Contracts with Deadwyler Transportation for 5 stops in the morning in Wards 7 and 8, and 3 stops after school at metro stations	\$405 daily/\$8,100 monthly	30-50
Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy PCS	Purchased vehicles that are run and maintained by the school, 8 stops throughout the city	\$52,000-\$74,000 annually	
KIPP DC PCS--College Prep	Contracts with Rome Charters to shuttle students to and from the metro before and after school	\$137,000 annually	850
The SEED School	Purchased vehicles that are run and maintained by the school, shuttle students to and from the metro on Sundays and Fridays	\$664 monthly	150
Mundo Verde PCS	Contracts with bus service for single stop in Mt. Pleasant	\$130,000 annually	
Washington Latin PCS	Contracts with 2 vendors for 5 stops throughout the city, runs once in the morning and twice in the afternoon	\$63,000 annually/\$1,800 per pupil	250
Kingsman Academy PCS	3 routes with 3, 9, and 11 stops mainly in Wards 7 and 8		