



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
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March 26, 2019

Mr. Scott Pearson, Executive Director  
DC Public Charter School Board  
3333 14th Street, NW Suite 210  
Washington, DC 20010

RE: April 4, 2019 Truancy Hearing

Dear Mr. Pearson:

In preparation for the April 4th oversight hearing on "Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and the Implementation of Reform Initiatives," I request that you answer the following questions. Please provide your responses no later than close of business on Tuesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you need clarification regarding any particular question, please contact me or Ms. Christina Setlow on the Committee of the Whole Staff.

1. In table format, please answer each of the following questions for school years beginning Fall 2014, broken out by grades k-5, 6-8, 9-12, and total (overall rate).
  - a) Total number of students against which the following percentages are calculated.
  - b) Percentage of students who were truant (10+ days unexcused absent). This includes students 21+ days truant. Indicate by footnote whether this is full-day or includes 80/20 tardiness.
  - c) Number/percentage of students who were 21+ days truant
  - d) Percentage of students eligible for referral (should have been referred) to CFSA
  - e) Percentage of students actually referred to CFSA
  - f) Percentage of students eligible for referral to Court Social Services
  - g) Percentage of students actually referred to Court Social Services
  - h) Number of students who should have had an SST due to attendance
  - i) Percentage of students who should have had an attendance SST (previous line (g)) and did have one.
2. Please provide examples, with details, of bus programs operated by (or contracted by) different charter schools to help students attend school. I am interested in this from the perspective of pursuing strategies that will reduce absenteeism and increase attendance.
3. Last year truancy increased over the previous year, and testimony at the Committees' January 31st hearing suggested that truancy continues to increase this school year. A continuing problem, at least within DCPS, is that schools are unable to hold the Student Support Team (SST) meetings required by law. Additionally, the government is spending millions of dollars annually to support the Show Up Stand Out program. Explain to me how we can believe that the charter school sector is operating with urgency to substantially reduce truancy in our public schools.

4. Explain in detail the new role for CFSA in working with charter schools to reduce truancy. Are there additional changes you recommend?
5. Your SY 2017-18 Attendance and Discipline Report is not nearly as comprehensive as the DCPS Annual Truancy Report for last year. In particular, it provides only a single datum for referrals to CFSA and referrals to Court Social Services. Why? Will the SY 2018-19 report be more comprehensive?

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson, Chairman

PM/ms



**Response to Prehearing Questions  
Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism,  
and the Implementation of Reform Initiatives**

1. In table format, please answer each of the following questions for school years beginning Fall 2014, broken out by grades k-5, 6-8, 9-12, and total (overall rate).
  - a) Total number of students against which the following percentages are calculated
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Please see attached. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) directly collects attendance data from each local education agency and, through a data sharing agreement, sends the data for public charter schools to DC PCSB directly through a nightly feed. The attendance data OSSE sends to DC PCSB is based on 80/20 attendance rules and not full day absences. The full day absences are needed to answer a number of these questions as they would allow us to know exactly which students should be referred to CFSA and CSS.

Specifically, as you will see in the attached document, we provided the calculations that we could do based on the data that we have. We did not calculate the percentage of students who are eligible for referral, parts d and f, because this requires us to know if students were absent for the whole day or partial day. Instead, we provide the total number of students referred to CFSA and CSS, in response to parts e and g. These numbers are not available disaggregated by grade band because CFSA and CSS only provide the aggregate data to the Every Day Counts! Task Force and do not provide us with the student-level data, despite having data-sharing agreements with them. For part h, students who should have had a Student Support Team meeting, we provided number of students who were truant, part b, as required by law. We began collecting from schools the number of students who received an SST meeting (i) in 2017-18. We will have the numbers for school year 2018-19 by August 2019.

2. Please provide examples, with details, of bus programs operated by (or contracted by) different charter schools to help students attend school. I am interested in this from the

### **perspective of pursuing strategies that will reduce absenteeism and increase attendance.**

Several public charter schools provide bus or shuttle transportation to their students. These schools include KIPP DC, Kingsman Academy PCS, The Children's Guild PCS, IDEA PCS, Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science PCS, Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy PCS, and Washington Latin PCS. School transportation programs provide busing from students' homes or designated pickups, shuttle service from WMATA metro stations or bus stops, or some combination of the two.

Most public charter schools contract with a transportation company that provides this service to students and assumes all liability. Some public charter schools have elected to purchase buses or passenger vans to run their own service. Running their own services requires additional insurance, staff and training, and logistical support.

The number of students who benefit from these services and the cost varies widely. For example, one public charter high school provides a shuttle service to and from the nearest metro station, which is available to every student. This school has a contract with a transportation company that costs more than \$130,000 annually. Another public charter school, that educates students K-8, contracts with a transportation service to run ten bus/shuttle routes across the city. Students are picked up and dropped off at designated bus stops, which include grocery stores, churches, and recreation centers. The cost for this program is \$90,000 monthly. Some schools have anecdotally reported an increase in student attendance because of these programs. DC PCSB is in the early stages of contacting schools to fully understand their programs so that we can run a comprehensive study on student attendance.

### **3. Last year truancy increased over the previous year, and testimony at the Committees' January 31st hearing suggested that truancy continues to increase this school year. A continuing problem, at least within DCPS, is that schools are unable to hold the Student Support Team (SST) meetings required by law. Additionally, the government is spending millions of dollars annually to support the Show Up Stand Out program. Explain to me how we can believe that the charter school sector is operating with urgency to substantially reduce truancy in our public schools.**

DC PCSB monitors sector-wide truancy rates and attendance data for all public charter schools. If a school's truancy rate reaches the threshold in our Attendance and Truancy Policy, the Board will issue a Notice of Concern. Those notices have led to schools examine the barriers to attendance and address these issues leading to truancy. For example, DC Scholars and Goodwill Excel PCS are two LEAs who received Truancy Notices of Concern in school year 2017-18; this motivated significant action at both campuses, and to date, both campuses have reduced their Truancy rates by approximately 20 percentage points.

DC PCSB also strives to understand the root causes of the attendance challenges displayed in our schools. A recent on-site audit of attendance data at The Children's Guild DC PCS revealed a number of challenges the school faces in driving strong attendance. The school's population is 83% at-risk, with homeless students representing 26% of their student body. Students struggle with housing instability, lack of reliable transportation, and deep anxieties fueled by traumas that make every day a challenge. The school seeks to meet students where they are both physically and emotionally by making significant investments in social workers and utilizing their own school busses to fill the unmet transportation needs of their population.

Public charter schools continue to utilize SSTs, SUSO, PASS, and other resources and interventions to address this issue. Public charter schools refer students to SUSO but very few are engaged by a CBO. DC PCSB lacks clear evidence regarding the impact of these programs and continues to seek data from these partners. We have requested that SUSO share either 1) the change in attendance patterns observed by students who participated in SUSO or 2) the unique identifiers of students who participated in SUSO so that DC PCSB could perform this impact analysis internally. SUSO has not responded to this request. Additionally, during the Every Day Counts! Task Force Data Subcommittee, we have repeatedly asked that SUSO share quarterly data updates so that we can better understand how the program is performing in charter schools. In December 2018, SUSO shared an engagement report of charter schools showing that charters had referred a total of 320 students to SUSO; however, only 31 (9.6%) were successfully engaged by their community-based organizations (CBOs). One charter network had submitted 37 referrals, zero of which were engaged.

DC PCSB worked diligently with SUSO in Fall 2018 to develop a student-level attendance feed which would provide attendance data to SUSO on behalf of engaged schools, simultaneously developing the legal framework necessary for the feed to begin. However, SUSO asked DC PCSB to put this project on hold, citing a lack of internal capabilities to ingest student-level data at that time. DC PCSB also provided PASS with a legal framework to submit requests for student-level attendance and discipline data. PASS has utilized this service twice in the 2018-19 school year. Without clear evidence that the two largest school-support agencies are able to effectively drive down truancy at the schools with which they work, it is unclear what DC PCSB should recommend to schools who feel they have exhausted their resources.

**4. Explain in detail the new role for CFSA in working with charter schools to reduce truancy. Are there additional changes you recommend?**

According to CFSA, they are in the development phase with community partners to implement the following: 1) development of a business process to support families when there is an official referral made to CFSA when a child has ten unexcused absences, 2) development of a business process to support early intervention when a child has missed five days of unexcused absences with the goal of preventing ten unexcused absences and a child welfare response, and 3) selecting school sites to test and pilot this new process.

The family service worker (FSW) triage unit will engage the reporting source from the referring school to determine the following: 1) if contact has been made with the parents, 2) if an intervention plan has been developed, 3) if a child welfare response is warranted. The new social work unit, separate from the FSW, is dedicated to investigating educational neglect referrals. Social workers will utilize strategic family engagement techniques to reduce family ambivalence and anxiety due to the public perception of what formal child welfare involvement entails. The goal is to build trust with families in order to properly assess the root cause of the chronic absenteeism, identify services or resources to support the goal of improving attendance and develop a plan of action to prevent out of home placement and strengthen family resilience.

The early intervention strategy involves schools reporting children to CFSA and SUSO when children reach five unexcused absences. Both entities along with other stakeholders would convene a Student Attendance Prevention Team Meeting (SAPT) to develop early intervention plans to prevent children from experiencing subsequent absences and identify services to support that goal. This particular strategy is still under development. It is DC PCSB's understanding that CFSA is in the process of hiring and training these social workers in early April and will be piloting this early intervention strategy in May

with at least 2-3 charter schools in Wards 7 and 8 with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

DC PCSB continues to recommend a stronger communication cycle between CFSA and public charter schools so that schools are informed of the outcome of CFSA investigations in a timely manner. Further, we are eager to see the implementation of CFSA's plan, to have designated social workers assigned as points of contact for targeted schools where there are high rates of chronic absenteeism in Wards 7 & 8, applied to all schools. Every school can benefit this level of customer services from a designated social worker contact at CFSA to provide support with concerns that don't always rise to the level of educational neglect.

Additionally, the most recent Every Day Counts! Taskforce revealed that 928 students who were referred to CFSA for having ten or more full-day unexcused absences were screened out, meaning that the concerns did not reach threshold for Child Protective Services response. We recommend that the Every Day Counts! Taskforce examine how we can bring services to those students. While they may not require a CPS investigation, their absenteeism clearly still demands a response, and the city should find a way to provide one. Perhaps the CFSA social worker can help meet the needs of students whose referrals are screened out.

**5. Your SY 2017-18 Attendance and Discipline Report is not nearly as comprehensive as the DCPS Annual Truancy Report for last year. In particular, it provides only a single datum for referrals to CFSA and referrals to Court Social Services. Why? Will the SY 2018-19 report be more comprehensive?**

Referrals to CFSA and CSS are based on full-day absences, while attendance data shared with DC PCSB is based on absences as defined by the 80/20 rule. As we have shared with the Every Day Counts! Taskforce, this makes determining the eligibility of students for CFSA and CSS referrals impossible. Without determining eligibility, it is also impossible to calculate a compliance rate. Charter schools are required to submit their total CFSA and CSS referrals one time at the end of the school year. However, both CFSA and CSS provide quarterly updates regarding the number of referrals received as part of the Everyday Counts! Task Force meeting materials. DC PCSB can incorporate these quarterly updates into our final report to provide a deeper understanding of how referrals rise over time.



DC  
**PUBLIC  
CHARTER**  
SCHOOL  
BOARD

DC Public Charter  
School Board

Truancy Pre-Hearing  
Questions

Attachment 1

SY 2014-2015											
Grade Band	# of Students Eligible for Truancy	# of Students Truant (10+ Days)	% of Students Truant (10+ Days)	# of Students Truant (21+ Days)	% of Students Truant (21+ Days)	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CFSA	# of Students Referred to CFSA	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CSS	# of Students Referred to CSS	# of Students who received an SST	% of Truant Students who received an SST
PK	51	16	31.4%	6	11.8%						
K to 5	14,586	2,728	18.7%	569	3.9%						
6 to 8	6,484	964	14.9%	168	2.6%						
9 to 12	5,604	1,458	26.0%	376	6.7%						
Adult	42	29	69.0%	20	47.6%						
Unknown/Ungraded	729	313	42.9%	202	27.7%						
<b>Charter Sector Total</b>	<b>27,496</b>	<b>5,508</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>1,341</b>	<b>4.9%</b>		<b>1,396</b>		<b>385</b>		

SY 2015-2016											
Grade Band	# of Students Eligible for Truancy	# of Students Truant (10+ Days)	% of Students Truant (10+ Days)	# of Students Truant (21+ Days)	% of Students Truant (21+ Days)	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CFSA	# of Students Referred to CFSA	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CSS	# of Students Referred to CSS	# of Students who received an SST	% of Truant Students who received an SST
PK	59	22	37.3%	8	13.6%						
K to 5	15,385	3,137	20.4%	559	3.6%						
6 to 8	6,980	1,111	15.9%	184	2.6%						
9 to 12	5,929	1,356	22.9%	434	7.3%						
Adult	25	13	52.0%	5	20.0%						
Unknown/Ungraded	51	28	54.9%	15	29.4%						
<b>Charter Sector Total</b>	<b>28,429</b>	<b>5,667</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>1,205</b>	<b>4.2%</b>		<b>1,334</b>		<b>187</b>		

SY 2016-2017											
Grade Band	# of Students Eligible for Truancy	# of Students Truant (10+ Days)	% of Students Truant (10+ Days)	# of Students Truant (21+ Days)	% of Students Truant (21+ Days)	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CFSA	# of Students Referred to CFSA	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CSS	# of Students Referred to CSS	# of Students who received an SST	% of Truant Students who received an SST
PK	77	24	31.2%	9	11.7%						
K to 5	16,311	3,533	21.7%	801	4.9%						
6 to 8	7,406	1,245	16.8%	267	3.6%						
9 to 12	6,293	1,715	27.3%	569	9.0%						
Adult	160	91	56.9%	55	34.4%						
Unknown/Ungraded	50	5	10.0%	2	4.0%						
<b>Charter Sector Total</b>	<b>30,297</b>	<b>6,613</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>1,703</b>	<b>5.6%</b>		<b>1,076</b>		<b>215</b>		

SY 2017-2018											
Grade Band	# of Students Eligible for Truancy	# of Students Truant (10+ Days)	% of Students Truant (10+ Days)	# of Students Truant (21+ Days)	% of Students Truant (21+ Days)	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CFSA	# of Students Referred to CFSA	# of Students Eligible for Referral to CSS	# of Students Referred to CSS	# of Students who received an SST	% of Truant Students who received an SST
PK	64	22	34.4%	13	20.3%						
K to 5	17,241	4,245	24.6%	1,014	5.9%						
6 to 8	7,942	1,585	20.0%	314	4.0%						
9 to 12	6,640	1,893	28.5%	693	10.4%						
Adult	179	121	67.6%	85	47.5%						
Unknown/Ungraded	5	0	0.0%	0	0.0%						
<b>Charter Sector Total</b>	<b>32,071</b>	<b>7,866</b>	<b>24.5%</b>	<b>2,119</b>	<b>6.6%</b>		<b>1,203</b>		<b>195</b>	<b>3,460</b>	<b>44.0%</b>