

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants



Public Oversight Hearing
on
Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and
the Implementation of Reform Initiatives

Testimony of
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Truancy Reduction Program Coordinator

Before the
Committee of the Whole
and
Committee on Education

John A. Wilson Building
Room 120
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

April 4, 2019
1:00pm

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, councilmembers, and staff. My name is Brenda Aleman, and I coordinate the truancy reduction programs for the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (OVSJG). I am pleased to share OVSJG's efforts to improve school attendance and appreciate the ongoing support of students in all eight wards of the District. Mayor Muriel Bowser has made substantial investments in our public and public charter schools and is committed to ensuring that our young people are making it to every class, every single day. Consistent student attendance is a citywide challenge that touches every grade level, ward, and school, but it is a challenge we can overcome. By working together as a community and involving students in the process, we can ensure that Every Day Counts!

I would like to focus my testimony today to further explore issues we identified at the hearing in January. As you may recall, I presented data on the *Show Up, Stand Out* (SUSO) truancy reduction program that demonstrated that as more years passed from initial referral, the re-referral rate for students increased. After the last hearing, we asked our evaluator to further break down the data in order to identify trends and found that there were some differences in re-referral rates and outcomes when results were broken down by community-based organization (CBO). This has led us to the decision to enter into a formative evaluation phase where our evaluator will further analyze program processes, review case files, and interview program staff in order to identify practices that may have influenced the increased re-referral rates and student outcomes.

To increase engagement, we have continued to work with DCPS to implement an opt-out consent form for families. I am pleased to report that the form has been approved by DCPS and we have started outreach to DCPS schools to identify what summer mailings, if any, where the form can be included. Related to family consent, the current SUSO program standards provide CBOs with 14 days to obtain family consent before a referral is closed. We are exploring expanding that window to 21 days to allow CBOs with more time to connect with families, and we are working with our evaluator to design a method to measure if expanding the time frame effects engagement.

We have previously discussed our efforts with DCPS and PCSB to import student data into our SUSO database, Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), and the data integration challenge we faced. We are in the process of configuring the necessary system changes and are also working



with DCPS and PCSB to finalize data sharing agreements. We anticipate all of these efforts will be completed by July. This data will be helpful in identifying students that have accrued three unexcused absences to give CBOs an awareness of those students on the cusp of eligibility for SUSO. The goals are to 1) allow CBOs to prepare for new students before the referral arrives and proactively engage the schools if specific referrals do not arrive; and 2) monitor ongoing attendance for students that have already been referred to SUSO.

We are also in the process of planning our annual SUSO Summer Training Academy where we will be bringing capacity building and professional development for SUSO program staff. We are currently exploring several options for trainings on how to better engage families within DC public schools.

Finally, while we have focused on quantitative data related to our truancy reduction programs, we would like to highlight the qualitative data and personal impact of the program. Attached to my testimony are several stories collected by our CBOs from SUSO families that demonstrate the real-life impact of the SUSO program.

I appreciate the Council's efforts to improve attendance in the District and look forward to continuing to work with you on these initiatives. I am happy to address your questions at this time.

