



**Testimony of
Dr. Michelle Walker-Davis, Executive Director
DC Public Charter School Board**

**Hearing on the ODCA Report on Education Data
Committee of the Whole
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Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. I am Dr. Michelle Walker-Davis, Executive Director of the DC Public Charter School Board. Thank you for inviting me to speak today about the ODCA report on education data in the District. Overall, DC PCSB continues to have many concerns about the report's narrative and conclusions. We laid out these concerns in our response to the draft report in December 2020. However, we feel the final version of the report still mischaracterizes the District's data practices and the relationship between DC PCSB and OSSE.

The report lacks crucial historical context about how OSSE has evolved over time and is unique as a state education agency. When I started my career in DC, I was an analyst in the District's Office of Budget and Planning's Education Branch where I worked on the very first budgets for the then State Education Office, OSSE's predecessor. When OSSE was created in 2007, I was serving in DCPS and watched as the agency was conceived. Now that I have returned to the District after a 12 year stint in Minneapolis-St. Paul, I can say that today's OSSE is very different from the one I observed back then. As the report notes, the relationship between OSSE and DC PCSB can be atypical at times. It is atypical, in part because the education landscape in DC has few, if any, comparable contexts across the country. It would be worthwhile to figure out how any changes would work in our data ecosystem before we create a patchwork from other states.

The relationship between DC PCSB and OSSE has developed over the past 14 years and continues to evolve. Multiple portions of the report imply an inappropriate relationship between DC PCSB and OSSE while leaving out context and reasons why certain data are collected the way they are. For example, the collection of attendance data started with DC PCSB because OSSE did not have the staff nor infrastructure in place in its early years. Over time with stability at the top, OSSE has built out processes and systems to accommodate this data and we have as a result shifted our collection responsibilities.

OSSE has built their systems and processes to strengthen data collection practices, while building productive relationships among key stakeholders. As OSSE makes clear in its testimony, there is always room to improve data and

technology efforts. OSSE's improvement in this area has been consistent, and they have a robust plan for future progress. Their approach, which has been rooted in reflection and collaboration, is the right one to drive improvements in the District. As OSSE builds both capacity and context, DC PCSB remains committed to supporting and bolstering their growth.

A consistent question in the report surrounds DC PCSB's involvement in and access to certain data while overlooking the reasons for that access. There are many data OSSE collects that we also need to use for our authorizing function. To be clear, our staff do not have the ability to edit any of OSSE's data on any metrics. Rather, OSSE makes aggregate data available for DC PCSB and school staff to view only. It makes sense for our staff to have viewing privileges to use metrics like in-seat attendance in our School Quality Report. Multiple state education agencies validate district data in a similar way. Among other applications, DC PCSB uses our view-only access to ensure that schools submit data in a timely manner and to observe trends within public charter schools.

The report suggests that DC needs to fundamentally change education data collection and analysis to be more in line with other states. However, DC is unique in its education landscape, and we cannot assume that systems that work in other jurisdictions will simply plug in and work here.

Ultimately, any specific off the shelf system will not substantially change the day-to-day operations in schools. Having spent a considerable amount of time working in urban education in Minneapolis- Saint Paul, I have seen how useful a well-regarded system such as the one in Minnesota can be. To be clear, what we are discussing today is not a panacea for academic achievement. As a former Chief Accountability Officer, I fully support efforts to improve our data quality and use over time. However, I do not think this is the most pressing issue before us. I would encourage us to leverage the data that we already have to focus on the continued reopening of schools this term, addressing the mental health needs of students, and preparing for in-person instruction in the fall. As students return to classrooms, we need to work to ensure that the education they receive daily is more equitable than it was prior to the pandemic and meeting their needs. By doing this, we will have a powerful impact on the performance of students over time.

Before I conclude I want to make a note of some of the analysis presented in the report. The report reaches many conclusions about student mobility, attendance, and other issues. Unfortunately, DC PCSB staff do not have access to the specific methodology used to produce these numbers. Therefore, we cannot replicate or verify the report's findings. For example, based on our own analysis, we do not have clear evidence that students leave

public charter high schools at higher rates than they leave DCPS high schools. However, as stated in our response, we would appreciate the opportunity to better understand the methodology employed and data used to inform the conclusions cited by the ODCA. We look forward to continuing the conversation with respect to the data analysis portions.

Thank you for allowing me to testify, my colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions.