

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

DRAFT

TO: All Councilmembers

FROM: Chairman Phil Mendelson
Committee of the Whole

DATE: December 7, 2021

SUBJECT: Report on PR 24-393, the “State Superintendent of Education Dr. Christina Grant Confirmation Resolution of 2021”

The Committee of the Whole, to which Proposed Resolution 24-393, the “State Superintendent of Education Dr. Christina Grant Confirmation Resolution of 2021” was referred, reports favorably thereon, and recommends approval by the Council.

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I. BACKGROUND AND NEED

The purpose of PR 24-393, the “State Superintendent of Education Dr. Christina Grant Confirmation Resolution of 2021,” is to appoint Dr. Christina Grant as the State Superintendent and head of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Dr. Grant is a resident of Ward 6. If approved, Dr. Grant would serve a four-year term from the date of her confirmation.

Dr. Grant holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and African American Studies from Hofstra University, a Master of Science degree in Teaching and Adolescent English from Fordham University, a Master of Education degree in Organizational Leadership from Columbia University, and a Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania. Additionally, Dr. Grant has a certificate in Urban Systems Leadership from both the Broad Urban Superintendents Academy and Teach for America.

Dr. Grant has served as the Acting State Superintendent of Education since June 2021. Prior to this role, she was the Chief of Charter Schools and Innovation in the Philadelphia School District for approximately two years, as well as the Assistant Superintendent of Opportunity and Innovation from July 2015 to July 2018. In these roles she oversaw 86 charter schools, 22 contract alternative education schools that comprised the Opportunity Network, and 20 Innovation schools, which altogether served over 80,000 students. This included her overseeing a billion dollar budget. Moreover, she served as the charter authorizer in Philadelphia, leading the review and approval process of three charter schools, the expansion of over 2,000 high quality charter school seats, and the closure of five charter schools. Dr. Grant's leadership also resulted in the Philadelphia School District receiving two U.S. Department of Education grants, totaling over \$2.5 million dollars, to support students and adult learning in non-traditional and incarcerated settings. Further, during her tenure, the number of students moving from "below basic" to "basic" on Pennsylvania's statewide assessment increased by 21% in English/Language Arts and 18% in math.

Before her time in Philadelphia, Dr. Grant was the Superintendent of the Great Oaks Foundation in Newark, New Jersey. In this role, she grew the Great Oaks charter schools from one in New Jersey to four schools in New York, Connecticut, and Delaware. Additionally, she supported the design of curriculum for project-based learning, incarcerated youth, and other non-traditional instructional models. She also led the process to change graduation requirements across several schools in the district. Further, she designed and implemented a high-quality professional learning continuum and employee engagement strategy, resulting in high levels of talent retention and promotion annually.

Dr. Grant has also served as the Executive Director of the New York Campaign for Achievement Now, the Managing Director of New Site Development for Teach for America, the Deputy Executive Director of the Office of Charter Schools at the New York Department of Education, and the Associate Director of Recruitment of Uncommon Schools, Inc. Additionally, she began her career in education as an English and Social Studies teacher in New York City Public Schools. All of this experience has made her well-suited to lead OSSE.

OSSE serves as the state's education agency (SEA) and is responsible for a myriad of issues such as early childhood education, including IDEA Part C services; K-12 academic oversight; special education, including non-public tuition schools and compliance; student health and wellness; administration of federal grant funding; administration of the District's statewide assessment (PARCC); collecting, managing, and analyzing education-related data; post-secondary matters, including the administration of DC TAG and other scholarship programs, and the Higher Education Licensure Commission; adult education and linkages to workforce development; and the District's special education transportation division. Yet, despite all these responsibilities, OSSE is still considered a young (SEA) having only been established in 2007 as part of D.C. Law 17-9, the "District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007."¹ While the first several years of OSSE's existence were tumultuous and a revolving door of state superintendents, OSSE's last permanent State Superintendent, Hanseul Kang, brought stability and enabled OSSE to make great growth during her tenure. Thus, OSSE's next State Superintendent

¹ Codified throughout Title 38 of the D.C. Official Code.

of Education will need to be committed to maintaining that stability while also being willing to push OSSE to continue to grow and succeed.

Such work will not be easy. Although progress has been made in the District's public education system since 2007, much work remains to be done. The District's achievement gap is still horrendously wide, and the pandemic has only made it worse. Students with special needs and those at-risk continue to struggle to make the same progress as their peers. Moreover, many students face months of learning loss due to the pandemic and have greater social emotional needs than pre-pandemic. Additionally, while the District is a national leader in pre-K education, the District is at a turning point for early childhood education (ECE) – referred to as childcare by some – particularly when it comes to ECE affordability and pay parity for ECE educators. Further, the District still needs to improve its educational data collecting, reporting, and transparency. As the District's SEA, OSSE sits in the middle of all of these issues, and the State Superintendent plays a critical role in each.

Dr. Grant's extensive background in urban systems leadership and her expertise in a diverse educational landscape like that in the District leads the Committee to believe that Dr. Grant is ready to be OSSE's next leader. She understands the importance of each of the issues discussed above, in addition to understanding the importance of a myriad of other issues not named in this report that OSSE handles every day. As part of her post-confirmation hearing questions, she indicated that four of her top five priorities are: 1) addressing the social and emotional learning needs for students and school staff; 2) increasing transparency with regard to the educational data collected by OSSE and responding to community feedback and to the needs of the District's local education agencies (LEA); 3) preserving and increasing access to affordable, quality childcare and taking better care of the ECE labor force; and 4) improving supports for special populations of students, such as those with special needs.² Moreover, in response to the Committee's question

Four Year Goals:

- 1) Meet [OSSE's] strategic plan goal of 1,500 more vulnerable infants and toddlers in quality childcare and 4,100 more students in high-quality pre-K classrooms.
- 2) Reverse the rising trend of chronic absenteeism and truancy rates and reduce to at least [SY] 2015-2016 levels (the first year [OSSE] publicly reported attendance data).
- 3) Return student achievement to pre-pandemic levels as measured by the annual statewide assessment while accelerating achievement for students with disabilities.
- 4) Meaningfully increase the number of students enrolling in higher education by 1,100 students on a path to complete a two- or four-year [college] degree.

Source: Christina Grant 11.30.21 Letter to Chairman Mendelson, page 5.

on what metrics the Council and public should use to judge her progress as State Superintendent over the next four years, Dr. Grant provided the following metrics:

² See page 3 of Dr. Grant's 11.30.21 Letter to Chairman Mendelson re: post confirmation hearing responses.

Additionally, in her written testimony and as part of her oral responses at her confirmation hearing, Dr. Grant spoke on these topics and her plans for addressing each. She also spoke in her post-hearing responses to how she plans to handle areas where she is not currently an expert. Given the size and scope of topics that OSSE handles, it is impossible for any person to be an expert in every area overseen by the agency. Thus, the Committee is looking for an individual who not only acknowledges this reality but has a plan for addressing the areas in which she is not an expert. The Committee believes that Dr. Grant is such an individual.

Given Dr. Grant’s background and understanding of the complex issues facing the District, the Committee believes that she is the best person to lead OSSE. She shows a deep passion and commitment to education and to serving populations of students, such as incarcerated students, that often get overlooked. Moreover, she understands the need for both stability within OSSE and continual change within the District’s educational landscape in order to close the District’s achievement gap. For these reasons, the Committee recommends that the Council approve Dr. Grant as the District’s State Superintendent of Education and leader of OSSE.

II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

October 5, 2021	PR 24-393, “State Superintendent of Education Dr. Christina Grant Confirmation Resolution of 2021,” is introduced by Chairman Phil Mendelson at the request of the Mayor.
October 15, 2021	PR 24-393 is “read” at a Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole and the referral to the Committee of the Whole is official.
October 22, 2021	Notice of Intent to act on PR 24-88 is published in the <i>District of Columbia Register</i> .
October 22, 2021	Notice of a Public Hearing is published in the <i>District of Columbia Register</i> .
November 12, 2021	The Committee of the Whole holds a public hearing on PR 24-393.
December 7, 2021	The Committee on the Whole marks-up PR 24-393.

III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Dr. Grant is the mayoral nominee for State Superintendent of Education. In her testimony, she spoke to her reasons for becoming involved in education, her passion for helping students to succeed, and her extensive background in the Philadelphia School District. Additionally, she spoke to her five priorities for OSSE and addressing the District’s educational issues: 1) prioritizing social and emotional supports and learning for students and school staff; 2) gathering and using statewide assessments and data to understand where the District is and to inform OSSE’s work; 3) making the data that OSSE gathers transparent and responsive to community feedback and to the needs of schools; 4) improving childcare in the District and demonstrating a commitment

to the District's childcare provider community; and 5) supporting special populations, such as students with special needs, better.

IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

The Committee received no testimony or comments from any Advisory Neighborhood Commission on PR 24-88.

V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public hearing on PR 24-393 on November 12, 2021. The testimony summarized below is from that hearing. A copy of the testimony pertaining to Dr. Grant is attached to this report. Also attached are Dr. Grant's answers to questions submitted by the Committee.

Jessica Sutter, Ward 6 Representative, DC State Board of Education, testified in support of PR 24-393. Representative Sutter noted that from 2014-2016 she worked with Dr. Grant during her time as the Assistant Superintendent of the Opportunity Network of the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During this time, Representative Sutter had the opportunity to witness Dr. Grant's deep commitment to student success and her focus on ensuring that ineffective systems did not stand in the way of students having their academic, social, and mental health needs met.

Carlene Reid, Ward 8 Representative, DC State Board of Education, asked the Council to withhold confirmation of Dr. Grant as the State Superintendent of Education until checks and balances were established. Representative Reid indicated that while she believes that Dr. Grant can lead OSSE, she worries about Dr. Grant's ability to do so authentically given the current educational governance structure in the District.

Jacques Patterson, At-Large Representative, DC State Board of Education, testified in support of PR 24-393 and stated that his conversations with Dr. Grant leaves him to believe that she may be the District's most impactful State Superintendent of Education ever.

Fritz Mulhauser, Public Witness, testified in support of PR 24-393 but urged the Council to question Dr. Grant about her plan for addressing the District's data "shortcomings" and her plans for the role of Assistant Superintendent of Data. Mr. Mulhauser incorporated several questions in his testimony that he advised the Council to ask Dr. Grant during her confirmation hearing.

Jessica Giles, State Director, Education Reform Now DC, testified in support of PR 24-393. Ms. Giles laid out several goals that she hopes OSSE accomplishes under Dr. Grant's leadership, such as, among other things, passing a policy that all elementary school teachers be trained in the science of reading, ensuring federal COVID-19 recovery funding is spent transparently and equitably, and improving supports for students with special needs.

Scott Goldstein, Executive Director, EmpowerEd, questioned Dr. Grant's qualifications since she was not a classroom teacher for more than three years. He stated that he could not take a position as to Dr. Grant's confirmation until he heard back from teachers who were members of his organization.

Abe Clayman, Director of Education Initiatives, Federal City Council, testified in support of PR 24-393. Mr. Clayman stated that he believed that Dr. Grant is well-suited to the challenges of leading OSSE, supporting District learners, and fulfilling OSSE's critical oversight role.

Shannon Hodge, Executive Director, DC Charter School Alliance, testified in strong support of PR 24-393. Ms. Hodge stated that Dr. Grant's extensive expertise in urban education settings makes her the ideal candidate to lead OSSE. Moreover, she noted that equity must be at the center of everything the District does in education and that she believes that Dr. Grant shares this view.

Peter Anderson, Head of School, Washington Latin Public Charter School, testified in support of PR 24-393 and indicated that the District needs leadership that is willing to listen, learn, take risks, and rise above pettiness and politics. He believes Dr. Grant is such a leader.

Erik Anderson, Public Witness, testified about his past experiences with OSSE with regard to reaching out to the agency in order to get them to change their regulations related to cloth diapering. He does not have an opinion as to Dr. Grant's confirmation.

William Hite, Jr., Superintendent, School District of Philadelphia, testified in support of PR 24-393. Superintendent Hite noted that Dr. Grant had a profound effect in Philadelphia because of her collaborative nature and that he is confident that she will be a tireless advocate given all that she can do.

Barbara Wells, Principal, School District of Philadelphia, testified in support of PR 24-393. Ms. Wells is the principal of the Pennypack House School, which is located within the county prison in Philadelphia, and was one of the principals in the Opportunity Network during Dr. Grant's leadership. She spoke to her experiences with Dr. Grant and noted that Dr. Grant supports students, parents, teachers, staff, and school leadership, which is rare in her experience, as often she finds that leaders leave out one or two of those subgroups.

JuDonn DeShields, Public Witness, testified in support of PR 24-393. While he is now a leader within DCPS, he previously served as a principal of an alternative high school in Philadelphia under the leadership of Dr. Grant. He stated that given his experiences, he believes Dr. Grant is a leader that shows up and puts students first.

Heather Harding, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, testified in support of PR 24-393, noting that Dr. Grant has the ability to work within challenging political contexts and has become masterful at strengthening complex organizations, such as OSSE.

Sheila Carr, Decoding Dyslexia, stated that she looks forward to Dr. Grant's inspired leadership. She did not testify in support of or against Dr. Grant but spoke to the need for full and

strong implementation of Bill 23-150, “Addressing Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties Amendment Act of 2020.”

Laura Fuchs, Teacher, District of Columbia Public Schools, did not speak to her support for or opposition to Dr. Grant as State Superintendent. Instead, she spoke to her frustration with the confirmation process.

Deana Ramsey, Principal, School District of Philadelphia, testified in support of PR 24-393 and indicated that Dr. Grant is a transformative leader. Principal Ramsey was a school leader under Dr. Grant’s leadership in Philadelphia and spoke to Dr. Grant’s leadership.

Mashea Ashton, CEO, Digital Pioneers Academy, testified in support of PR 24-393. She stated that she has known Dr. Grant for over 20 years, leading all the way back to when Dr. Grant was a teacher in New York City. She stated that Dr. Grant is a teacher first and foremost and that she believes Dr. Grant is the right leader at the right time for OSSE and the District’s schools.

The Committee also received testimony from *Curtis Valentine, Reinventing America’s Schools* in support of PR 24-393.

VI. IMPACT ON EXISTING LAW

The adoption of PR 24-393 would have no impact on existing law. Dr. Grant would serve a four-year term as the State Superintendent of Education in accordance with D.C. Official Code § 38-2601.

VII. FISCAL IMPACT

The approval of PR 24-393 will have no fiscal impact. Dr. Grant’s salary is part of OSSE’s annual budget.

VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

<u>Section 1</u>	States the short title of PR 24-393.
<u>Section 2</u>	Approves the nomination of Dr. Christina Grant as the State Superintendent of Education for a four-year term.
<u>Section 3</u>	Directs transmittal of the resolution to the appointee and to the Office of the Mayor.
<u>Section 4</u>	Effective date.

IX. COMMITTEE ACTION

X. ATTACHMENTS

1. PR 24-393 as introduced.
2. Nominee's response to Committee questions.
3. Written testimony and comments.
4. Legal Sufficiency Determination for 24-393.
5. Committee Print for PR 24-393.

1 **DRAFT COMMITTEE PRINT**
2 **Committee of the Whole**
3 **December 7, 2021**
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10 A PROPOSED RESOLUTION

11 24-393
12

13 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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17

18 To confirm the appointment of Dr. Christina Grant as the State Superintendent of Education.
19

20 RESOLVED, BY COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, that this resolution
21 may be cited as the “State Superintendent of Education Dr. Christina Grant Confirmation
22 Resolution of 2021”.

23
24 Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia confirms the appointment of:

25
26 Dr. Christina Grant
27 N. Pierce Street, N.E.
28 (Ward 6)
29

30 as the State Superintendent of Education, established by section 2 of the State Education Office
31 Establishment Act of 2000, effective October 21, 2000 (D.C. Law 13-176; D.C. Official Code §
32 38-2601), in accordance with section 2 of the Confirmation Act 28 of 1978, effective March 3,
33 1979 (D.C. Law 2-142; D.C. Official Code § 1-523.01), to serve a 4-year term.

34 Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia shall transmit a copy of this resolution,
35 upon its adoption, to the nominee and to the Office of the Mayor.

36 Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.