

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

### “Academic Achievement in the District of Columbia”

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, for convening this hearing on academic achievement. My name is Robert Henderson. I am the Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education. These views are my own and do not represent the views of the Board as a whole.

Much of the discussion today will center on test scores. As a matter of framing, I would like to say that our students achieve academically in all sorts of ways. When I drop my kids off at school each day, my hope for them and for their peers is that they learn something, and that something may or may not be measured by CAPE. Still, the test scores that we have indicate that we have a long way to go in reaching the achievement levels that we would like to see and in eradicating the gaps that we know should not exist.

At last year’s hearing on academic achievement, I said that I think that it is vital that the Council view its influence on academic achievement on at least three levels: structural, systemic, and school. I’ve made some updates to my testimony this year, but much of it is the same, because we find ourselves in essentially the same place we were a year ago.

First, structural. We know that academic achievement correlates strongly with socioeconomic status. Students learn best when their basic needs are met — food security, income security, healthcare, and housing stability. Socioeconomic comfort affords all sorts of benefits and freedom from stressors that negatively impact the academic achievement of those living in poverty and economic insecurity. The Council can act on measures like the District Child Tax Credit and can work to fortify the distribution of public benefits that are all important in their own right, but are also important for moving the needle on academic achievement. Many people will mention chronic absenteeism today — these structural issues, not just school-level issues, drive absenteeism.

Second, at the system level, the Council and the Chairman specifically has made great effort to stabilize school funding, thank you, we also need to do more to fund our schools adequately and equitably. Throughout this budget season, I ask the council to ask the executive branch if and how the DME’s 2023 Funding Study will shape spending decisions. Among other things, the study recommends increasing the weights of several student categories.<sup>1</sup> DC’s school system concentrates students with the greatest needs. We have supplemental funding for schools with more than 40% and 70% at-risk enrollment. It is not

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<sup>1</sup> Grades 1-3, at-risk, adult, students with disabilities, and English learners.  
<https://app.box.com/s/v2j675bdum1tkyu2efgmr1rz1edcpgbk>.

enough. Furthermore, we have 24 schools with more than 80% at-risk enrollment. Those schools may need substantially greater resources than schools with much smaller shares of at-risk students.

Finally, at the school level, stability and continuity among school leaders, teachers, students, and programming are important as are engaging teaching and learning and strong relationships between teachers and students. All of this underscores how important it is to support our educators. Among the things that could help here are universal teacher induction standards to include at least three years of mentorship for new teachers and replacing the IMPACT evaluation system with a nonracist, teacher-informed, growth-oriented evaluation.

If we want to see big gains in student achievement, and more importantly, in student learning, we need to make big changes in how we support families and educators. Namely, we need to address poverty in a comprehensive and sustained way. And we need to address the concentration of high-need students.

Thank you again for your attention to the issue of academic achievement; I am happy to answer questions.

Robert Henderson