

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC HEARING
on
Agency Performance Oversight:
OSSE
on
Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

Hello Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Robert Henderson. I am here in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

My testimony will speak to the performance of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and is based in part on my own experience and in part on issues that have come to me as representative of Ward 5 residents and school communities.

I first want to thank OSSE for their participation in the SBOE Graduation Requirements Task Force. In addition to Dr. Chimere Jones, who serves as a task force member, several other OSSE staff members, including Superintendent Mitchell, have joined task force meetings to answer questions about the proposed revisions. I look forward to continuing our work with them in the upcoming months.

I also applaud OSSE for publicly reporting the course catalog and hope that it can be made more detailed and user friendly in the future.

Turning to areas where constituents have shared concerns with me about OSSE performance:

I continue to hear from Ward 5 families about difficulties with transportation for students with disabilities. This includes ride times in excess of expected times according to the family handbook. Imagine spending 3-4 hours a day on a bus to attend a school within DC. I have also heard reports of families filing complaints and receiving no response or follow-up from managers. I ask OSSE to continue to seek improvement in these areas, and also to proceed as expeditiously as possible on the implementation of the GPS tracking system. Families have been waiting for years for this real-time information and would like to see it come to fruition without further delay.

I ask OSSE to reassess and improve the process for verifying and appealing Equitable Access eligibility status. Currently, there is no way for a family to know or verify eligibility

before the lottery is run and seats begin to be filled. Consequently, if a mistake has been made, even if a family corrects it, there may no longer be slots available.

Appeals for eligibility are managed by schools or LEAs and there is not clear, uniform, public-facing information outlining an appeals process or guidance for families on necessary documentation, or who to contact.

Schools also manage the waitlists and it seems that there is not clear guidance on how to order the waitlists as seats become open once the deadline — June 1 for most charter schools and July 1 for DCPS — has passed. It can be confounding for families who have students on an EA waitlist for a school that is advertising open EA seats.

At present, it seems that there is not sufficient oversight of the EA allocation process or appeals process at the school level.

Finally, I will say again that to effectively play the role of the state education agency as in other states, OSSE should not report to a local office, the same office that the largest LEA reports to, and the same office that appoints the authorizing board of the other LEAs, nor can it provide oversight for the provision of services that the agency itself provides.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, State Board of Education