

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING**

on

“Teacher and Principal Retention”

on

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 2:30 p.m.

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson, for convening this hearing. 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.

I believe that stability and continuity among teachers and school leaders are among the most important in-school factors contributing to school improvement, so I am encouraged to see that OSSE’s 2025-26 Educator Retention Brief shows a modest upward trend in the percentage of teachers staying in their roles year-to-year. The same report shows a flat trend in the percentage of teachers leaving the DC education system each year. We have much room for improvement, and retention may become more important in the future if the trend of fewer people entering the profession continues.

We have had years of discussions, surveys, and testimonies in which teachers have told us what would help increase retention, and thanks to the Washington Teachers’ Union and EmpowerEd we have updated data from their City-Wide DC Educator Survey representing both sectors. They are telling us again, what matters for retention. We should listen and respond accordingly.

A point reinforced by the survey is that we are overdue for an overhaul of the DCPS teacher evaluation system, which has been found to have disparate racial impacts, continues to be cited as a driver of teacher turnover, and contributes to the perennial debate over sector budget equity. It should be replaced by a teacher-informed, growth-oriented evaluation system. More effective models may exist within the charter sector.

You will hear from many educators at this hearing and they will speak for themselves, so I will spend the rest of my time on what the State Board has done in recent years and is currently doing on this topic. In February 2024, the board adopted a resolution in support of funding for Whole School Educator Wellness grants. I thank OSSE and the Council for continued investment in these grants and encourage their inclusion in future budgets. Later in 2024, the board adopted a resolution recommending the implementation of a statewide induction and mentoring program for new teachers.¹

¹ State Board of Education Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Induction and Mentoring Program for New Teachers in the District of Columbia, SR24-27. “Now, therefore be it resolved, that OSSE should implement a mandated, system-wide induction and mentoring program for new teachers across public and public charter schools, lasting three years and designed to provide sustained mentorship, foster ongoing professional development, and include comprehensive data collection and tracking to assess progress, outcomes, and effectiveness.” <https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/publication/attachments/SR24->

To advance this work, the State Board has identified support for early-career teachers as one of its three strategic priorities for this year. I will note here that the Educator Retention Brief shows that 20 percent of first-year teachers and 16 percent of teachers with 2-5 years of experience left the system between the 24-25 and 25-26 school years. The Educator Excellence Committee is leading the board's work on supporting early-career teachers through review of teacher induction programs around the country, existing strategies and programs employed by DC LEAs, and planned focus groups to identify current challenges and needed supports and resources. We look forward to sharing our findings and related recommendations with the Committee of the Whole and the public later this year.

I was happy to see that you had invited Laura Maestas to share about DC Prep's Junior Teachers Program because their approach exemplifies how supporting early career teachers through mentorship and guided experiences can be paired with providing veteran teachers with flexible scheduling and increased planning time, both of which teachers have identified as retention solutions.

We do not lack for solutions, but we need to prioritize, implement, and fund them.

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

Robert Henderson