

**CHAIRMAN PHIL MENDELSON  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
ANNOUNCES A PUBLIC HEARING**

**on**

**Agency Performance Oversight:  
Deputy Mayor of Education**

**District of Columbia Public Schools**

**Office of the State Superintendent of Education**

**on**

**Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson. 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.

I will speak to the performance of the three agencies in turn, aiming to incorporate a mix of praise, push, and ask for each.

*Deputy Mayor of Education*

It is a little bit difficult to speak to the performance of the DME's office over the past year as we have yet to see the final products of the three major projects they have been working on in the Boundary, Master Facilities, and Adequacy studies, and a fourth in leading the School Safety Enhancement Committee. It is not too soon to say that am thankful for their engagement work through these processes, especially in meeting with Wheatley Education Campus families around possible changes to their middle school. I've attended several of the boundary study meetings and am particularly appreciative of thoughtful responses to questions from Jenn Comey.

Some of the proposed recommendations in the boundary study seem promising to me, and I hope the DME will follow through with recommending a dual language plan that gives more options for families in Wards 7 and 8 (Recommendation 9), and aligned planning across sectors and requiring an impact assessment for proposed school openings and expansions. (Recommendations 23 and 23.1). I will note that this highlights a major deficiency of our governance system in that there is no entity that can compel cross-sector planning and coordination but can only recommend it.

Finally, I ask the DME, in cooperation with OSSE, in their respective capacities related to Out of School Time activities to develop supports and pathways to enable student-led and student-initiated organizations to compete for grant funding.

### *District of Columbia Public Schools*

I would like to thank DCPS for working with the John Burroughs and Bunker Hill communities in Ward 5 to secure in-neighborhood swing space. I know that comes at a cost, but I believe that the stability that will offer to those school communities will be well worth it. I hope that similar solutions can be found for schools like Whittier.

My push for DCPS is to negotiate a contract with the Washington Teachers Union. A 17-year veteran DCPS teacher testified before the State Board last October that 12 of those 17 years had been on an expired contract. Across multiple chancellors and mayors, delayed negotiations appear to be a deliberate tactic. I find this disrespectful to the teachers we desperately need to retain and irresponsible for budgeting, setting up retroactive lump expenditures and volatility for the charter teacher pay.

I ask DCPS to recommit to digital equity and to submit an updated Technology Plan that gets the LEA back on track to keep devices on lifecycle at one-to-one ratio for grades 3-12. Please see Grace Hu's testimony for more details.

### *Office of the State Superintendent of Education*

Thanks to Dr. Grant and the many OSSE staff members who have worked on advancing DC learning standards. In the past year, OSSE's learning standards teams incorporated considerable feedback to the new social studies standards, developed groundbreaking menstrual health standards, and has presented strong draft financial literacy and social emotional health standards.

I continue to hear reports about late, long, and unpredictable transportation for special education students with OSSE DOT. OSSE reports improvement by the measure of buses leaving the terminal on time, but that may not be the best measure of families' experiences. Incomplete, inaccurate, or nonexistent communication leaves families in daily uncertainty and disruption. In January 2023, Ward 5 resident and parent Beth Daggett shared several short- and long-term suggestions for improving planning, service, and communication. She has submitted those suggestions again along with her written testimony of continuing difficulties. Among other things, she notes that a tracking type system was first promised in 2019. Please do read her testimony.

I think these issues are symptoms of larger problems. First, the lack of special education capacity within the city leaves hundreds of students traveling out of state and many more across the city. Second, in most any other place, student transportation is a local function, with a state agency providing monitoring and oversight. We are missing that basic accountability mechanism that an independent state agency could provide.

I ask that OSSE, with budget support from the Council, permanently fund and expand Whole School Educator Wellness grants. They have shown promising signs for supporting educators and increasing retention. It would also be helpful for grantees to have a longer term so that they can better recruit staff for these programs.

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

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, State Board of Education