



Testimony of Abe Clayman
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Federal City Council

Committee of the Whole
Chairman Phil Mendelson

**Public Hearing on the “DC State Education Agency Independence Amendment Act of 2021” and the
“Office of the State Superintendent of Education Independence Amendment Act of 2021”**

October 26th, 2021

My name is Abe Clayman and I work at the Federal City Council on education initiatives. I am here today in support of the current system of education governance. Before joining the Federal City Council, I worked in the District’s public charter schools for 14 years as a teacher and principal. I was also an ANC Commissioner for four years. I understand firsthand how the current system is supporting student progress. Dismantling that system will put 14 years of student progress at risk.

The Federal City Council supports the District’s current education governance system of mayoral leadership with Council oversight. It’s proven to be successful. No other urban district in the country has demonstrated more improvement over such a long period. This year, as students and families face unprecedented challenges during the pandemic, the Council should not dismantle a governance model that is working.

Under this system, the District has made steady progress, including in the following areas:

- Enrollment in the District’s public schools has increased 22% since 2001 from 76,000 to 93,000.
- Steady improvements on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly called the Nation’s Report Card, have made the District the nation’s fastest improving major city school system.
- Since 2010, high school graduation rates have improved from 58% to 70%.
- Innovative educators and parent communities have partnered to create new, high-quality DCPS and public charter schools. These include Montessori, dual language, early college, and single-sex programs in both sectors.

The Council Should Not Pass Proposed Legislation That Puts Student Progress at Risk

The Council should preserve the ability of the Mayor to select the Superintendent and manage the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. This approach has a number of benefits:

- **First, it avoids dysfunctional political fights.** An elected school board has governed DC’s public schools in the past. This structure created a deeply politicized, corrupt, and dysfunctional system that did not deliver results for students.
- **Second, it has a clear line of accountability.** Mayoral leadership with Council oversight creates a clear, single line of accountability to the Mayor—whom voters know and can hold accountable. When the Superintendent is a direct report of the Mayor, the Mayor is accountable for OSSE’s results. Changing that structure weakens the ability of the Council and the electorate to hold the Mayor accountable and the ability of the Mayor to hold the Superintendent accountable.

- **Third, there is clear financial responsibility.** When the Mayor appoints the fire chief, police chief, and other agency leaders, she knows she must fund those agencies appropriately to achieve their goals — voters will judge mayoral efficacy based on city services and results. Responsibility creates incentives for adequate funding.
- **Lastly, OSSE can collaborate with other agencies.** To succeed, the Superintendent needs to collaborate with other agencies like DC Health and DCRA and the leaders of those agencies report to the Mayor, enabling them to work closely together.

The Council and Mayor Should Build on 14 Years of Progress

The Mayor and the Council should accelerate, not draw back, from education reform. The Council should use its existing authority to support and pass research-based policies proven to support student learning, particularly for low-income students and students of color.

1. **LEA oversight bodies should have the authority** to verify data accuracy and investigate the causes of inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading data. The DC Public Charter School Board already has this authority for public charter schools. It has even revoked the charter for schools that were financially mismanaged. OSSE should have similar authority over DCPS.
2. **Support the work of the new DC Education Research Collaborative**, housed at the Urban Institute, and provide funding for research-based education programs and reforms.

Our students are making progress under the current system. As you consider this legislation, we urge you to support this progress and not dismantle a proven system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer questions.