

ON THE PATH TO GREAT RESULTS FOR THE DISTRICT'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THE HONORABLE DANIEL K. AKAKA, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, RANKING MEMBER**



**TESTIMONY OF VICTOR REINOSO
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**

MARCH 14, 2008

Good morning Senator Akaka, Senator Voinovich, and members of the subcommittee. I appear before you today to report on the progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the Mayor's public education reform initiatives and on the strategies we are developing to continue that momentum going forward. First, however, I must say how incredibly proud I am of the team that Mayor Fenty has put together to lead the agencies where this work is happening, and of the job each of them has done thus far to respond to the Mayor's charge that we not just reform, but really remake, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and that we do this as quickly as humanly possible. As you will hear in the testimony, each of them – at DCPS, the new Office of the State Superintendent for Education, and the Office of Public Education Facilities Management – already has made great strides to address critical problems within their agencies (in some cases more progress than had been seen in many years before this team took charge) and, at the same time, they are developing the long-term strategic plans that will guide us towards continued, systemic improvement in the future.

The District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 enabled the Mayor to embark on a sweeping array of initiatives and reforms to the city's education system, some of which have already begun to fundamentally change our approach to public education in the District. My office was established to oversee all of those efforts and to ensure that the entire District government – including both our education and non-education agencies – moves forward coherently and in alignment towards our shared goal: ensuring the success of every student. I also have been charged by the Mayor with marshalling all of the District's resources – public, private, and in the community – to improve the educational processes and outcomes for all the District's students to prepare them for successful futures. Thus, while each of the District

witnesses who follows me will describe his or her own strategic plan to move us toward this goal within the scope of their agency's mission and capabilities, I will discuss the role of my office in coordinating these plans, and, as importantly, ensuring that the human and other resources are available to support their execution.

Progress to date

To accomplish this critical task, I have organized the office around four broad activities:

- Coordination of a District-wide educational strategy that meets the needs of students, parents, and the community across the education life-cycle (from early childhood to adult education)
- Coordination and direction of high-quality services and programs that reach across city agencies and educational institutions to improve child and youth outcomes;
- Development of robust partnerships with community based organizations and the private sector that provide the District's education system with critical new resources ; and
- Leadership and support to Office of the State Superintendent, Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and Ombudsman.

We are moving forward successfully on several fronts, which I will discuss briefly here.

Coordinating A District-wide Education Strategy

When we set out to improve our public education system, the Mayor made a foundation decision to attack the problem comprehensively. The Administration views education as a continuum

from birth into adulthood – learning is always taking place and access to quality educational opportunities must exist at every level. Also, it is not enough to transform what happens in the classroom; to succeed, we also must meet needs students bring from outside the classroom. As a government, the District must bring to bear all of the resources of its public and private sectors – in a coordinated manner – to support children and learning in order to create an environment in which they can succeed.

My office is well-positioned not only to think strategically about the direction of the District’s education reform efforts, but also to address specific challenges and tackle special projects that support implementation of the plan. We are able to take on work that will enable the Chancellor and State Superintendent to be more effective in their efforts. For example, my staff has played a leadership role in planning around how to align our education-related infrastructure and resources with outcome-driven priorities (including the rapid closure of key service gaps). This work is continuous and correlates directly with the top priorities of the Mayor.

Most recently, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education has been leading the planning and coordination around the school facilities consolidation effort, which has been driven by the Administration’s view that school buildings, as public assets, should be used in the most efficient manner possible to serve the overall District strategy for delivering high-quality educational services to residents. In this role, my office provided capacity to the Chancellor and her team around analyzing data, creating strategies for replacing underperforming programs with ones that will be attractive to families, engaging the community in this process, and, ultimately, developing recommendations for the DCPS school reorganization plan. This joint effort led to a

proposal that will enable the Chancellor to drive resources down to the classroom *and* provide higher quality academic services to students across the city.

While the Chancellor and her team lead the school system through its transformation to a system of academic excellence, my team will continue to plan and develop policy for the most appropriate utilization of the excess school facility space. Specifically, by combining our planning efforts with development plans for the city as a whole, we can take fuller advantage of the tremendous opportunities that exist to provide additional public education and city services and supports for students and families.

In addition, because we approach the reform agenda from a big-picture perspective, we can identify gaps in academic and support services and work with the agencies to close those gaps. One example of this is our work with DCPS on the development and implementation of an alternative high school model. This project began with the identification of the need for an alternative strategy for reaching older students who are at risk, either academically or because of school attendance and/or discipline issues, of dropping out or not graduating with a diploma. As an education strategy, an alternative high school program is necessary to meet these students where they are and get them back on track. And as an interagency strategy, it will be a useful tool in combating drop out and further at-risk behaviors among older youth. While we are still in the planning stages, my office has scanned best practices, identified the universe of potential partners, and identified possible sites for moving the project forward.

As noted above, the Mayor's education initiative is being pursued on numerous fronts, and my office is uniquely positioned to guide those efforts without being involved in the day-to-day management and operations of the education agencies. This allows us to aggressively pursue particular high priority initiatives, restructure and reorganize services, and manage agency performance while keeping an eye on the big picture. Our relationship with OSSE and OPEFM illustrates this approach. I have two goals in mind as I oversee their work: ensuring they have the resources necessary and the support from other agencies to be successful and ensuring that their efforts are aligned with the Mayor's overall education reform agenda.

With OSSE, there are two looming priorities: aggressively tackling problems in our special education system and addressing our high-risk designation for Federal grants. We also are working closely with OSSE on implementation of its comprehensive student data warehouse and tracking system, strengthening our parent involvement mechanisms as a state, and supporting, with strong expectations of accountability, DCPS and public charter schools as they work to restructure or address deficiencies in student achievement.

OPEFM has a more narrowly defined, though no less daunting, task: repair, maintain, renovate, modernize, and construct as many of our school facilities as quickly, efficiently, and effectively as possible. OPEFM's job is to execute; they execute according to a capital budget and a facilities plan. We are working with OPEFM to revise the Facilities Master Plan, aligning it with a reorganized school system, more strategic delivery of education services, and budget realities. Also, we will work with OPEFM to ensure that we have a workable plan for stabilizing the rest

of the school system facility inventory and getting all schools, particularly those receiving students through the Chancellor's reorganization plan, ready for opening in the fall.

Integrating Government Services in Support of Educational Success

A second critically important function of my office is to lead and coordinate the activities of the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC), a panel created by the Mayor's Education Reform legislation and comprised of the agency heads from over 20 agencies that touch the lives of children and families, from the Child and Family Services Administration and the Department of Health to the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services and the Metropolitan Police Department. ICSIC has a unique ability to identify new ways that we as a government can increase the chances of success for our students. To guide this work, the ICSIC adopted six citywide goals for youth to focus our conversations. They are:

1. Children are ready for school.
2. Children and youth succeed in school.
3. Children and youth are healthy and practice healthy behaviors.
4. Children and youth engage in meaningful activities.
5. Children and youth live in healthy, stable, and supportive families.
6. All youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

The ICSIC has now completed its first round of meetings on each of the six youth development goals, and last month we reviewed progress on the first goal, Children Are Ready For School.

We have accomplished the following around this goal thus far:

- Developed a definition for school preparedness.
- Developed a school preparedness assessment, which will be piloted in 50 preK and 50 kindergarten classrooms in April and May, with a planned city-wide rollout next fall.
- Tracking infant health indicators, including birth weight, blood lead levels, and immunization rates across the District.

We have laid the groundwork for progress on the other goals and I expect similar accomplishments. More importantly, we're seeing a real commitment and buy-in from the agencies toward this kind of integrated approach that we haven't seen before.

Through ICSIC, my staff also is working on the pilot implementation of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary assessment instrument that will identify at-risk youth, provide therapeutic interventions, and assist in the development of integrated service plans for these children. This was identified in the Public Education Reform Act as one of the key deliverables of the ICSIC. Its development has involved establishing an information-sharing agreement between numerous agencies that never existed before and the creation of a database for monitoring student cases. We are working with the Chancellor to identify the pilot schools where the project will be introduced first, with a plan to begin in two schools this April and four or five more in August.

Public-Private Partnerships in Support of Education Reform

Finally, the work of my office in the development of partnerships takes on many facets: meeting with organizations seeking to support the Mayor's education reform efforts; tracking down and developing new partnership relationships, reviewing existing partnerships to better understand

coverage and gaps and to determine their effectiveness in moving us towards our strategic goals, and enhancing the scope of existing successful partnerships to reach even more students. Since October, my office has met with over 30 organizations. Seven of those meetings led to new partnerships, including partnerships with the Ford Motor Co., the National Institutes of Health, and the Washington Performing Arts Society. I believe the success of these meetings is evidence that the Administration has communicated effectively with external stakeholders about our commitment and strategic approach to improving education in the District, and shows that there are many, many people in the private and non-profit sectors who are ready to help, so long as they feel that their efforts are part of a larger plan to move forward.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share with you the progress the District is making in reaching its goals for education reform. I look forward to your questions.