

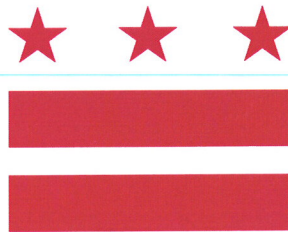
**D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS:  
TAKING STOCK OF EDUCATION REFORM**

**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 KERRI L. BRIGGS, PH.D.  
ACTING STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**JULY 23, 2009**

Good afternoon Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, distinguished members of the subcommittee, committee staff and guests. I am Kerri Briggs and I serve as the Acting State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia. It is my pleasure to be here this afternoon to discuss the role of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in the Mayor's effort to reform education in DC.

It is truly a special time for education reform in the District. We have a Mayor, a Council, a schools chancellor, many principals and charter school leaders who are dedicated to improving schools for our students. Thousands of dedicated teachers and other staff are joining in and embracing a new culture of achievement. Last but not least, we have a federal stimulus that includes millions of dollars to support academic innovation.

When my predecessor became state superintendent in 2007, she took on a role that never before existed – and she did a tremendous job of uniting disparate agencies into one cohesive whole. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) was created two years ago to comply with federal education law and is designated as the “state education agency.” This office was created to manage federal funds so that the local education agencies (DCPS and charter school LEAs) could focus on working with schools. My office is also responsible for two vital pieces of a quality education system: housing a data system to effectively track student academic performance and the licensure of teachers and principals within DCPS.

In my short time serving in this role, I have identified certain challenges ahead of us, one of which is discussed in the GAO report. In 2006 and again last year, the U.S. Department of

Education placed DC schools on “high risk” status due to mismanagement of grants, and failure to comply with federal rules. After nearly eight years with the U.S. Department of Education, I know the ins and outs of the system. I have seen firsthand how the relationship between federal, state and local agencies can have a profound impact on kids. I am confident the priorities we are setting at the state level will maximize the impact of the Chancellor’s reform efforts.

That’s why my colleagues and I have been working diligently to correct these problems. OSSE is working with the U.S. Department of Education to address our high risk grantee status through the design and implementation of a comprehensive and strategic Corrective Action Plan (CAP).

In my first 3 months, the CAP has been designated as OSSE’s top priority and a dedicated team of analysts has been assembled and moved to the front office of the organization to steward this reform effort. OSSE is using our CAP as an opportunity to drive reform and implement change throughout the entire organization.

To that end, OSSE is committed to using stimulus funds to advance American Recovery Reinvestment Act (ARRA) principles set forth by the U.S. Department of Education:

- \* Expand and improve early learning opportunities.
- \* Raise standards and improve assessments.
- \* Recruit, retain and support effective educators, and ensure that they are equitably distributed.
- \* Build robust data systems that track student progress and improve practice.

- \* Turn around low-performing schools, focusing on dropout factories and their feeder schools.
- \* Expand college access and completion.

We are set to distribute funds quickly to LEAs and other entities in order to avert layoffs as well as create jobs, to raise student achievement through school improvement and reform, to ensure transparency, reporting, and accountability, and to measure and track results.

CAP processes are being embedded within the organization and are being applied to our receipt and use of ARRA Stimulus Funds. ARRA and our high risk grantee status are providing OSSE with the opportunity to set new standards around federal grants management. We will also take advantage of the ARRA reporting requirements to gather and analyze data that in turn will inform future policy decisions.

It is OSSE's sole fiduciary responsibility to receive, distribute and account for all ARRA education funds in the District including the funds awarded under the Government Services portion of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. This may include such non-educational institutions as DC's Department of Housing and Community Development.

It is my intention to pursue all available ARRA funding opportunities. In cases where DC's high risk status may hinder being awarded additional competitive grant monies, I intend to seek partnerships in hopes a collaborative or consortium will strengthen the District's application.

The result of this work will see DC educators taking maximum advantage of federal and local funds, it will ensure every taxpayer dollar is used as effectively and efficiently as possible, and our federal funders will no longer consider us a “high risk” investment.

At the same time we are cleaning up our business operations, we also are working on efforts to improve student achievement. My team is currently assessing our data systems and capabilities, and will work aggressively to improve upon them to make data an effective tool at the school, district, and state level. The first step in that process is to develop and implement the Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data system (SLED).

Once built, the SLED will enable the sharing of critical information that tracks student learning spanning early childcare, preschool, K-12, post-secondary, and adult-serving education. It will ultimately link to other youth and adult-serving institutions to provide a comprehensive picture of the District of Columbia’s learner populations. This information will assist in meeting educational needs and increasing stakeholder involvement by supporting trend analysis, performance projections, program implementation, program evaluation, and better planning. Stakeholders will use the SLED data to identify which factors contribute to closing the achievement gap, determine the kinds of programs that work best for particular students, and identify strong school settings and educational best practices that are improving student achievement.

During the past year, the production of the unique student identifier (USI), which included student demographic enrollment information, was released. The USI is the key lever for linking all student data together within the SLED and with all other educational systems within OSSE. .

In February 2009, OSSE provided assessment data to LEAs at the student level dating back to 2006. This was the first time LEAs received currently enrolled student data, enabling administrators and schools to make programmatic decisions. The SLED team provided technical assistance to LEAs on how to interpret the data and look for trends among students to improve instruction.

The state superintendent's office also sets teacher quality criteria as required by the No Child Left Behind Act. As of October 2006, OSSE changed its criteria to align with the federal definition of "highly qualified." Under this definition, all teachers must have at a minimum a bachelor's degree, state certification, and demonstrate subject area knowledge through a competency test, an evaluation, or completion of additional degrees or credentialing.

Accountability extends to more than our students and schools, but to our internal management performance as well. In an effort to create a culture of accountability, the ePerformance management system was instituted on October 2008. It established clear expectations for all staff within the agency at the beginning of a set rating period. This user-friendly, paperless system allows for a smooth and continuous flow of information from manager to employee. Supervisors and employees cooperatively set goals and individual development plans.

ePerformance has been operational since January of 2009. OSSE has successfully moved through the implementation timeline and will close mid-year discussions this month, during which supervisors held formal meetings with employees to discuss performance and development. We are looking forward to completing the last phase of training for all supervisory employees this September, final evaluations of all employees by November, and a successful implementation of all elements as planned by the end of this year. I am confident that this system is setting clear expectations for all employees which is an integral part of working towards achieving the OSSE's strategic objectives.

The reforms that the District has put in place represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform our broken school system and our strategic plan will make the state superintendent's office more nimble, more responsive, and more accountable to families and taxpayers. It means issuing clear and timely guidance to help educators access available resources. It means focusing energy and resources on the challenges identified in the OSSE strategic plan: inadequate grants management, lack of access to quality special education, and the need for a reliable data system to track student achievement. It also means collaborating with other states to develop rigorous, research-based, internationally benchmarked common standards to make sure that when DC students graduate from high school, they are prepared to succeed in college, and to compete in the global marketplace.

The good news is that we are seeing results of the Mayor's reform efforts. Preliminary results of the 2009 DC Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS) show continued progress in student achievement. Overall, reading scores are up 3 points and math scores are up 6 points over 2008.

Reading and math scores went up in both elementary and secondary schools and across DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools (PCS).

As you know, my agency does not work directly with schools, but we can and must free talented educators of the red tape that currently binds them. If we do a better job of allocating resources and human capital, they will have greater flexibility and freedom to help our students improve.