

**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 VICTOR REINOSO
DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**

JULY 23, 2009

Good morning Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Voinovich, and members of the subcommittee. I am pleased to appear before you today to report on the continued progress made by the District of Columbia in implementing the Mayor's public education reform initiatives. Over the past two years, the District has become a focal point for the national education reform community, and I believe what we are doing here, and the progress we are making, can and will serve as a model to other urban jurisdictions seeking to improve dramatically the public educational opportunities available to children.

As we explained to the Committee last year, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) was established to perform two main functions: 1) to ensure that the education reform efforts of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, and the Ombudsman for Public Education are aligned in priorities and strategies; and 2) to marshal the District's resources – public and private, education and non-education – to support education reform efforts and outcomes for all the District's students. My office has made significant progress on these fronts, and I am happy to share that progress today.

Aligning Education Policies and Priorities

From the beginning, the Mayor has asked us to focus on implementation and accountability for results. In preparing to take over the school system, we noted the numerous reports and plans that had been developed – and subsequently, had piled up – over the years and resolved to hold ourselves accountable for execution and results. My office's role is to make sure we are all moving at the same pace, on the same page, and on the right track. We problem-solve where

there are obstacles or issues, keep staff focused on the agenda, and help develop the right strategy to address a given issue.

Alignment of strategies comes in many forms, but almost always involves convening the right people around the table. Prior to the Mayor's reform, this was the missing piece. City leaders would constantly hear the complaint from agencies that the school system was not at the table, and likewise the school system would complain that they had little or no collaboration with other city agencies. Alignment of reform strategies became even more important as we separated state from local education functions and facilities and other education-related services from the school system.

We have established several mechanisms for regular, agenda-driven communication among the education agencies, at leadership and staff levels. My office also leads working groups and conversations around specific big-picture priority issues. For example, every other week, we host a working group focused on special education issues, composed of staff from the OSSE, DCPS, and the Office of the City Administrator. There is a similar working group focused on school health. Much of the alignment deals with the relationship among the OSSE, DCPS, and public charter schools – in particular, we continue to lead ongoing conversations around accountability and assessment, and have assisted with the integration of data systems for both OSSE and DCPS.

Similarly, at the program level, the DME has worked with both DCPS and the OSSE on developing strategies and policies for alternative education, discipline and attendance, and adult education programs. We are currently working with a public charter school on developing a

partnership with DCPS that will provide an alternative education option for DCPS and public charter school students, along with professional development and other resources for DCPS staff. Because of our unique position, we are also able to leverage resources and partnerships from other agencies, including utilizing the Office of the City Administrator and the child welfare agency to develop policies for truancy and attendance.

Finally, my office continues to work closely with DCPS, OPEFM, and city planning staff around school facilities planning, and the Mayor recently submitted to the Council a revised Master Facilities Plan that will modernize every classroom over the next five years. We are also developing a coherent planning structure for DCPS, charter school, and excess school facilities. Utilizing the District's school facility assets strategically, we can create better learning environments and expanded opportunities for children across the city.

Through these efforts, I am confident that the education strategies and policies of District agencies are aligned. The June 2009 draft GAO report came to the same conclusion after careful review.

Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission

The other major focus of the DME over the past two years has been the initiatives associated with the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission, ICSIC. Identifying the needs of children and families inside and outside of the classroom and figuring out how to address them by creating innovation and coordinating existing efforts within other agencies is challenging and intense. However, early results are promising and demonstrate that we are on the right track.

Part of our charge from the Public Education Reform Act is to develop and incubate innovative programs that address issues affecting social and emotional development of students, school climate and safety, and alcohol and substance abuse. We do this by researching and selecting evidence-based programs and initiatives and then piloting them carefully at the school level. At the end of the pilot period, the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and then transition them to a home agency where they can be scaled up and implemented permanently.

This past school year we successfully implemented the DC START multidisciplinary school mental health and intervention program. We hired seven social worker clinicians to serve students at six DCPS elementary schools and one middle school. The clinicians receive extensive supervision and training, and function as important members of the school staff. We strongly believe in the DC START model and its comprehensive approach to early intervention. Of particular importance is the family outreach component of the program. Clinicians have assisted parents and families with finding employment, addressing housing issues, and seeking help with financial, health, and substance abuse issues. By connecting the wellness of the home to the wellness of the child in the classroom, we aim to take early intervention services to a new level.

In addition to DC START, ICSIC has implemented four other evidence-based programs this year:

- Second Step, a violence prevention curriculum teachers can utilize that addresses aggressive behaviors and emphasizes positive peer interactions and social competency;

- Life Skills, an alcohol- and substance-abuse prevention program being taught by health and physical education teachers in elementary and middle schools;
- School Resource Officer (SRO) training, a program designed to train Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) school resource officers in research-based techniques and practices based on the community policing model in order to improve school safety and climate and the relationship among safety officers, school staff, and students; and
- Primary Project, a school-based early intervention program being implemented by the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to address social and emotional needs of children in pre-kindergarten through first grade as they transition into school.

Combining Second Step, Life Skills, and DC START, we are serving over 5,500 students at 50 schools. Adding in SRO training and Primary Project, over 300 DCPS, MPD, and DMH staff working in schools have been trained in the past eight months. My office works steadily on monitoring the programs and their implementation, reaching out to school-based staff, and problem-solving to ensure that the programs are utilized effectively and have the maximum positive impact on students and families.

Finally, we continue to work across agencies through ICSIC to improve outcomes related to health, student achievement, youth engagement, and transition to adulthood. Highlights of the past year include:

- With a committee composed of representatives of DCPS, Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC), and community-based organizations, there is a new, improved structure for out-of-school-time (OST) programs, ensuring that every DCPS has a quality OST program that matches

the needs of the school community. This structure has been so successful that we are now working to implement it citywide with five major agencies that utilize community-based organizations to provide services to children and families.

- Leveraging the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) federal grant awarded to the District last year, we have developed professional development for school and administrative staff, placed emergency-safety flipchart books in every school classroom in the District, and created a school emergency plan for every public school.
- Through the school health working group mentioned earlier, we have steered the development of school health regulations, improvement of curriculum and program issues within schools, and development of a plan to expand access to school-based health centers at high schools over the next five years.

The goal of all of these efforts is to provide a safer, more supportive learning environment for students so that they can take full advantage of the educational opportunities made available to them.

While I think the Committee can agree that we have made substantial progress in only two years, we have much work left to be done. With this in mind, we endeavor to continue moving forward, with an unwavering commitment to implementation and results. Again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues today. I look forward to your questions.