

DC Council Round Table on *The Future of School Reform in the District of Columbia*

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Council Member Grosso and members of the Education Committee, I appreciate your holding this initial hearing and reaching out to the public to gain a better understanding of where we have been and where we might go from here based on what we have learned. It is a good moment to do so before you approve a new DME and chancellor. 10 years ago we made radical governance changes. In the same time frame our city has added thousands of residents; we have invested heavily in our DCPS school buildings and continued to expand the charter school inventory.

The governance change has meant that the state education agency and DCPS are now fully under the executive. The chancellor works for the Mayor. With the recent debate on the advisability of a 5 star rating system for schools in the ESSA proposal, largely supported by the charter sector, DCPS was required to support the Executive's preference which in this case aligned with the charter board's recommendation. This had to override their own assessment or that of their teachers, parents and community, regarding the fairness or effectiveness of this simple rating approach.

PERAA set out to streamline decision making and grant the executive enormous power. When it abolished the Board of Education for DCPS, it also abolished a process that required transparency, closer oversight and more of a role for the public. Under 3 mayors, 6 deputy mayors and 3 chancellors those processes have not been voluntarily put in place.

In a sense all of those functions have fallen to the Council Committee on Education. It is a tall order for you to fill given your other responsibilities. The Board met monthly, budgets were reviewed, policies like local school plans, grading and attendance were discussed and when required voted on; grants were reviewed, new staff members were introduced, questions were asked and public testimony received. The early warnings on the deeply problematic practices in our high schools may well have had a public airing there when the private pleas were not heard. Many of the particular issues aired today about the negative consequences of some of the strategies supported in DCPS over the last 10 years hopefully would have gotten more examination and evaluation sooner. It is not a full remedy but I believe it would have helped.

I am advocating that we look at the best way to fulfil this function together. I know our previous boards had challenges but so does our current system. I view these functions as indispensable to a civic institution. We are relegated now to the role of commenting and

criticizing after the fact. A consumer does not have a role of investing in and supporting success. We need to be partners not consumers, owning the challenges for our children and our schools and owning the strategies to fix them. This will require a change.

Our public education system in DC includes the charter schools. I don't think 20 years ago or 10 years ago the vision was to have 67 different school systems with no check on the opening of new schools. I don't think we have ever looked at what this actually costs and how effective it is as a way to educate all the children of the city. The City has elevated the concept of choice above all else in its actions.

You know that I want to see a strong system of DCPS schools and a public education infrastructure that we as citizens own and can count on. I think the charter sector is an important part of our public infrastructure but I don't think an unlimited number of privately managed independent school systems is the vision for our future here. It is where we are headed though.

The cross sector task force has not risen to the challenge yet. What values will govern the analysis of the citywide data on education. The proposal is to have the DME, Charter School Board and Chancellor – school leaders then decide on openings and closings and siting with public engagement. There is no agreed upon vision and education plan that will guide these decisions. If the DCPS chancellor works for the Mayor and the Mayor would like to see a continued basically unlimited expansion of the charter sector, **preserving and growing a strong DCPS really won't happen**. You have supported DCPS in the capital budget, its existence and stability is endorsed by elected leaders but there is no plan to make it happen. The Council has to require an evaluation of where we are, and an education plan that includes a vision for public education for the city that tackles these issues. In the absence of a plan, you could cap enrollment at a percentage for the charter sector. We have to believe that an evaluation and planning task will be overseen by leadership that wants to see a strong DCPS and that we have the policy structure to make that possible. You have the opportunity with your review of our current structures and the required approval of a DME and chancellor to set us on a corrected course and make these things possible.