

**Testimony of Josephine Baker, Executive Director
D.C. Public Charter School Board
Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government
Wednesday, September 16, 2009**

Good Morning Chairman Durbin and members of the Subcommittee. I am Josephine Baker, executive director of the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (PCSB). I am pleased to come before you today to discuss the use and impact of Federal appropriations provided to improve the education of children in the District of Columbia. We appreciate the support of the Federal government in helping the charter schools contribute to the reform of public education in the District of Columbia.

Role of PCSB & Growth of Charter Schools

The D.C. Public Charter School Board was created in 1997 and is currently the only authorizer of public charter schools in the District of Columbia. The Board began authorizing schools in 1998, and has since developed a comprehensive accountability system and oversight process that has become a model for authorizers throughout the United States. It provides important feedback for schools as they strive to serve the diverse needs of their students, and it informs parents and policy makers about how effectively students are being served in each school. The Board's current accountability system includes:

- Self-study reviews for first-year schools; program development reviews for schools after the first year; special education quality reviews, compliance reviews and financial management reviews for all schools; high school transcript reviews; and preliminary charter reviews for schools entering the fifth year of operations.
- standardized test score analysis and NCLB report cards;
- quarterly charter school leaders' meetings, and communications with school leaders, as needed, on local and federal policy updates.
- Ongoing review of performance outcomes dictates board actions, which could include approval to expand, or sanctions leading to charter revocation.

Oversight & Accountability

The Public Charter School Board's performance and accountability standards and measurements are used to ensure high quality charter schools and eliminate non-performing schools. Starting this month, we are taking charter school accountability one step further, with the implementation of our new Performance Management Framework (PMF). The PMF, supported by newly developed information technology infrastructure, will facilitate the evaluation of charter school performance, based on common measures across all schools. These measures include absolute student achievement as well as

student growth performance measures and indicators of readiness for high school and college, and non-academic measures, including governance, compliance with local and federal laws, and financial management. Additionally, the framework measures achievement of mission-specific goals at each school.

The PMF will improve the PCSB's ability to define high, medium, low-performing and at-risk schools and to clearly communicate the expectations, rewards and consequences to schools, families and communities. This framework will allow the Board to make clear judgments about school performance and better manage the portfolio of public charter school offerings. The key objective is to drive high-achieving schools to full potential, mediocre schools to high-achieving levels, and to eliminate low-performing schools. In addition, the PCSB will provide struggling schools with targeted support and allow high performing schools more freedom. The PCSB's previous accountability system was comprehensive but more focused on individualized evaluations of each charter school's annual performance.

Results of the review will be publicly available in fall 2010 and will provide the community with a comprehensive view of public charter schools' academic, fiscal, and governance performance. The Public Charter School Board is the first authorizer to implement this model for charter school accountability and it was developed with funding from the Dell and Gates foundations. The newly developed technology structure is being implemented with funds from the Walton Foundation.

Growth of Charter Schools

D.C. public charter schools expect to serve 38% of all public school children in the District of Columbia. Since 2004 we have seen significant growth in the number of charter schools from 22 schools to 57 schools today on 99 campuses offering an array of programs and specialties. During this time, the student population has grown from 10,019 to approximately 28,043 for the current school year. We will have audited enrollment figures in January 2010. (See attached growth date and audited enrollment charts.)

The oldest of the charter schools has completed 12 years of operation. Many have made remarkable progress over time. Schools with unique missions such as Latin, bilingual, public policy, performing arts, and math, science and technology, are showing their value as students move on to other charter schools and college. We have also seen a remarkable difference in the proficiency of students who have stayed in charter schools longer between those that are new to charter schools. Many charter schools accept students who are several years below grade level and in a short time have brought the students to grade level. Others have struggled to progress in their start-up years, and must make significant progress in a short period of time in order to keep their charters. Several others have had their charters revoked, or closed voluntarily, because of poor academic and or financial performance.

Use of Federal Funds Since 2004

The majority of the Federal appropriation is directed to schools through the D.C. Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE). The PCSB oversees how schools spend those funds appropriately. Since 2004, D.C. public charter schools have used their Federal appropriations on facilities financing, federal grants designated for unmet needs and school quality and program administration. (See the attached chart detailing the allocation.) D.C. charter schools have used most of their appropriations on facilities because the limited funds they receive from the city has been insufficient to allow schools to find affordable buildings in D.C.'s real estate market. Schools have made good use of the unmet needs designations of federal grants for a variety of initiatives including special needs compliance, school improvement, college access and college prep programs, truancy, data collection, and technical assistance and professional development to school leaders for compliance with local and federal mandates.

Results

We have seen significant results over the past five years.

- Student progress on standardized tests. In 2009, 79 percent of secondary schools showed reading gains of up to 26 points and 71 percent of secondary schools improved math scores by as much as 39 points. Sixty-one percent of elementary schools had reading gains of up to 29 points, while 57 percent of elementary schools had math gains of up to 33 points.
- Improved student outcomes on graduation rates (88% in 2008) and college acceptance (80% in 2009).
- Expansion of high performing schools to allow more children to attend.
- Enhanced and improved facilities with state of the art technologies, green space and labs. A number of schools have built beautiful buildings in the middle of areas targeted for revitalization.
- Improved delivery of special education services.
- Improved responsible stewardship of federal dollars.
- More effective information management which impacts operations and instructional efficiencies.
- Since 2004, 10 charter schools have closed for either poor academic performance or poor financial management and operations. Sixty percent of those schools closed for financial reasons ranging from mismanagement of funds to insufficient cash balances. The other 40 percent were closed because of low academic performance. (See attached list of charter school closed.) A total of 20 schools have closed since charter schools were first created in D.C.

Plans for FY2010 Funds

In FY 2010, Federal charter school funding will be spent in four areas: facilities, charter school quality, unmet needs and program administration. (See attached proposed spending plan) As in the past, the plan is for a majority of the request to be used by OSSE to provide facilities financing including low interest loans to assist schools with

facilities acquisitions and renovation. A portion of the facilities financing will be spent on a City Build Initiative, a joint neighborhood revitalization and education initiative that builds strong communities that will support quality school choices in targeted neighborhoods. Additionally, some of the facilities funding will be made available through grants to cover the costs of renovating public facilities leased to public charter schools.

The funds allocated to charter school quality will support enhancement of new and existing schools through teacher quality initiatives and to enhance leadership of school principals, performance measurement tools, school improvement activities, and improved school governance. Some of the funds will provide competitive grants to schools to adopt or implement an evidence-based model program that will increase student achievement. There are funds set aside for replication of high achieving schools by providing growth capital and program start-up grants. In addition, a portion of the funding will be allocated to No Child Left Behind technical assistance to help reduce the number of schools in improvement and increase the capacity of schools to implement school-based management models.

The funds set aside for unmet needs will cover special needs compliance and service including complying with local and federal mandates. It will also create a flexible funds grant that will provide small competitive grants based on proposals crafted at the classroom level. These funds will allow for more charter school integration and ensure that the charter school sector is able to access District-funded resources where shortages exist.

Lastly, a small amount is set aside at both the state and authorizer level for program administration to oversee and administer these programs.

We appreciate your support which helps charter schools in continuing to be pace setters, inspiring a collective rise in the quality of all public schools, so that D.C. students and families will have difficulty choosing between many great school options. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony and I am happy to take your questions.

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