

TESTIMONY OF DEXTER WILLIAMS

Before the DC State Board of Education OSSE's State Education Plan

March 15, 2017

Good Evening. I am Dexter Williams – a resident of Ward 7 and member of the Hillcrest Community Civic Association's education committee.

I want to thank the members of the State Board of Education for the opportunity to testify about OSSE's state education plan.

Over the last several months, OSSE has conducted several community engagement forums across the city. Many of us who attended their Ward 7 forum left the engagement forum confused about some aspects of their plan and concerned about its potential impact. While I understand that OSSE's role is to provide an overarching framework for public schools to implement, I am concerned that the proposal lacks clarity on key points and does not fully consider the implications for the community.

In regards to family engagement, the relationship between a student's family and school is critical for educational success. ESSA encourages and incentivizes engagement activities, and I strongly recommend that the Board encourage OSSE to develop a framework for rating schools based on their level of engagement with families.

During OSSE's Ward 7 forum, many of us expressed concern over the stability of teachers, particularly at underperforming schools. These schools often see high staff and teaching turnover, critically undermining the school's ability to improve every year. These professionals are pillars of the education system, and their consistent presence among students is critical to student success and should be measured.

In regards to high school metrics, I urge the Board to encourage OSSE to include college enrollment through completion as a measure. While I appreciate the challenges with this kind of undertaking – although there are companies that provide this information for districts –, the high school experience should give students the tools that they need to succeed in all aspects of higher education. It's important that high schools not only prepare students for the academic rigors of college, but also provide them with resources that would help them complete their degrees. There are some schools in the city – and across the country – that are working toward this goal, and I strongly recommend that schools be required to develop systems to track this information.

As you know, OSSE's proposal sets an ambitious goal of reaching 85 percent proficiency in math, science, and language for all grade levels being tested by 2039, which should be applauded. However, the proposal doesn't offer guidance on how schools should achieve this goal. OSSE should revisit this and provide schools with more direction in reaching 85 percent proficiency.

I appreciate your consideration of my concerns and look forward to working with you to ensure that all students are receiving the highest quality education.

Thank you.