

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC HEARING
on
Agency Performance Oversight:
PCSB and DME
on
Wednesday, March 5, 2025 at 9:30 a.m.

Hello Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Robert Henderson. I am here in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

My testimony will speak to the performance of the Public Charter School Board and the Deputy Mayor for Education.

PCSB

First, for the Public Charter School Board — as I testified last week regarding DCPS, I will say also of the charter sector, we simply must do better to serve students with disabilities. The stories that I hear from families that have had to fight for every service they got for their students, often succeeding only after engaging an advocate or lawyer, come from both sectors. Although the report of the D.C. Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued in December noted that charter schools are more likely than DCPS to settle due process complaints, there are still too many cases that come to the point of a complaint.

Secondly, I think that we all agree that outcomes such as what transpired with Eagle Charter school last year should be avoided. Although I supported the Board's decision to reject the proposed takeover by another LEA, Eagle's health should never have become so dire, nor should its closure have been so abrupt and disruptive to families and staff. I share and appreciate the conclusions evident in PCSB testimony that stronger oversight is warranted and that charter board members likely need more training and support.

Finally, I am unconvinced that "accountability" in the form of the ASPIRE framework or the specter of closure is an effective or sufficient driver of school improvement. I think OSSE or the PCSB might need to intervene with resources or direction to drive improvement.

DME

For the Deputy Mayor for Education's office, I fully agree with and appreciate the testimony that "We must also do more to tackle the root causes of poverty, as we know our schools

cannot bear this responsibility alone.” Indeed, I believe that addressing poverty holistically is the most significant thing we could do to improve student outcomes. I also think that we need to do more to address the concentration of need that we have in our school system. We have supplemental funding for schools with more than 40% and 70% at-risk enrollment. It is not enough. Furthermore, we have 24 schools with more than 80% at-risk enrollment. Those schools may need substantially greater resources than schools with much smaller shares of at-risk students. Increased funding weights for several student populations, including special education, as recommended by the DME’s 2023 Funding study would be a good start, but only if it is implemented.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Robert Henderson

Ward 5 Member, State Board of Education