

Statement by D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson on *An Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape*, a report mandated by the D.C. Council and published under contract with the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor.

The report released today by the National Academy of Sciences underscores what the District's public school advocacy community has known for quite some time: education reform requires sustained, long-term effort. This report is the final step in an independent evaluation of the District's public schools since the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 gave the mayor control of the public schools. The report describes a reform effort that is very much a work in progress: sustained, slow gains in test scores, particularly in math, but a persistent achievement gap between the District's rich and poor students.

The Council tasked the Office of the D.C. Auditor with administering the contract for the evaluation and specified that it would be conducted by the Academy and its National Research Council. To date a series of reports on business practices, human resource operations, academic plans, and student achievement have been issued on subcontract with the Academy, by Ed CORE, at George Washington University, and those reports are available on the DC Auditor's website. I thank the evaluation committee for their excellent work – for a comprehensive, ideology-free assessment of what has transpired since the legislation was enacted in 2007. I encourage a thorough review of their findings.

The report begins to frame a series of next steps for policy-makers in the 25-year effort to build stronger public schools. This may be the greatest value going forward -- specific recommendations that the Council can usefully review, debate and act upon. The report recommends development of a comprehensive and publicly available data warehouse and ongoing evaluation of schools and student outcomes. It urges the District to “confront the serious and persistent disparities in learning opportunities” across “student groups and neighborhoods.”

Additional points made in the evaluation that merit further discussion and decision-making include the following:

- A significant absence of oversight and accountability for the performance of the District's public charter schools, which now serve fully half of public school students. “The city's current oversight structure does not adequately monitor learning conditions and outcomes for all students and groups,” a report summary notes. “Nearly half the public school students attend charter schools, but the governance structure does not clearly address monitoring for these students.” The report notes the tension between the rationale for charter schools – the ability to innovate, free from school system rules – and the need for accountability for charter use of taxpayer dollars. The 2006 law failed to address the charter accountability issue, and as a result, “leaves D.C. with important issues to consider about the oversight of the education of all of its students.”
- The law created an interagency structure to coordinate services across agencies overseeing education, health, mental health, social services, and juvenile justice based on successful efforts in Auburn, New York. The Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission (ICSIC)

operated for only two years, though the mandate was not repealed. In its absence, the report notes: “There is no entity that can provide for the information sharing, collaboration, and support that are critical for many D.C. students.” The report does not make the logical connection between this failure and the persistent achievement gap for disadvantaged children. Educators plead that all of a child’s needs cannot be met in the classroom. ICSIC, mandated in PERAA but begun as a pilot two years earlier, was designed to bring all of the city’s services to bear in the efforts of schools to lift children out of poverty. There is a clear and demonstrable link between collaboration across systems that touch children and families, and the persistent achievement gap.

- “The budgeting process does not appear to be either simpler or more transparent than it was before PERAA.” The NAS committee details the differences between current budget operations and what was in place prior to the legislation including an earlier annual discussion of budget priorities and a working group on the student funding formula that included parents and others but “was disbanded in 2007.” The report does acknowledge some recent steps by DCPS to include more and better school-by-school data in annual budget presentations.

It is my hope that this report will be reviewed, discussed, and used – and not simply shelved! As mentioned above, securing stronger public schools is a long-term effort and one that requires persistence and patience as well as intellectual honesty and collaboration. The Office of the D.C. Auditor is pleased to have had a part of this process and, per our statutory mandate, we are prepared to provide whatever additional assistance may be useful to the D.C. Council.

Prior to assuming the role of D.C. Auditor in December, 2014, Kathy Patterson was elected to three terms on the D.C. Council, including serving as chairman of the Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation from 2005 through 2006.