



HOW THE DC COUNCIL CAN HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION DATA

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TESTIMONY TO THE DC COUNCIL

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Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and other distinguished members of the DC Council, thank you for inviting me to join you today as the Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education consider bill 22-0776, the District of Columbia Education Research Advisory Board and Collaborative Establishment Amendment Act of 2018.

My name is Steve Glazerman. I am a senior fellow at Mathematica Policy Research, where I lead the Educator Impact Laboratory and have been studying the effectiveness of education programs and policies for the past 20 years. In my work I have relied heavily on data from DCPS, DC charter LEAs, My School DC, and OSSE to conduct scientific research in close collaboration with these agencies. Over the years, I have had many professional interactions, such as reviewing research products and co-presenting on conference panels with leaders of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, the Education Research Alliance of New Orleans, the Houston Education Research Collaborative, the Philadelphia Education Research Collaborative, and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools. I also worked on the DC Education Collaborative for Research and Evaluation, known as DC Ed-CORE. I've reviewed this legislation and I'm happy to share my feedback with members of the Council today.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF PUBLIC FUNDS IS IMPORTANT BUT SHOULD REMAIN SEPARATE FROM SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH.

First of all, I applaud the council for its legislative efforts to foster continued education research in DC and to make data more available and transparent. However, there are some small changes that would make this effort more successful. The entity that is being created by this bill can serve an important function, but I strongly recommend removing the term “research

collaborative” from its name. The current council action should really focus on the audit function, which is distinct from research and is characterized more by oversight of government agencies than collaboration with them. In a moment, I will outline some steps the council can take to create a separate entity that will enable a more traditional research collaborative to be successful.

By combining scientific research aimed at improving education with an audit function aimed at increasing accountability of public funds, the legislation tries to accomplish too much at once. Both roles are vitally important, but they should function separately and independently. Separate entities are important because building a scientific research agenda to learn what works and improve practice requires a close and trusting relationship between education practitioners and the qualified researchers. On the other hand, strong accountability requires an arms-length relationship between auditors and the agencies they are investigating. The proposed education research collaborative, to be housed within the Office of the Auditor, raises some concerns for me as a researcher. Attempting to incubate a true research collaborative within an auditing agency would sow confusion and conflict within such an agency.

THE MANY USES (AND USERS) OF EDUCATION DATA.

It may help to clarify what is actually meant by research. There are four uses of education data that tend to be lumped together and called research, but the following distinctions can be important for the council to keep in mind:

- (1) Scientific research
- (2) Program improvement research
- (3) Partisan research
- (4) Audits and investigations

All four uses of data are important, but they operate in different ways, by different people and with different funding sources and motives. Therefore, they deserve different policy responses to enable them. The first two of those categories, scientific research and program improvement research, require active collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Most have diversified funding sources, including grants from private foundations, not just a single government agency. Scientific research tends to be carried out by academics with the goal of

publication. Program improvement research is most typically sponsored by education agencies themselves and often done as an internal function or under contract with partners working directly for the education agencies. The distinction between academic and program improvement research is sometimes referred to as basic versus applied research.

The last two categories are quite different. Partisan research, work carried out by advocates like nonprofits and community groups, can be useful as long as all researchers on both sides of an issue have equal access to data. Audits and investigations represent an important public function that can be conducted with public funding, whether by the council, an inspector general, the auditor, or through private institutions including media outlets. The most important thing to remember about these different uses of data is that they should be kept separate.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROVIDES A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS.

We can look to the federal government, where Congress has set up two separate entities, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), as a useful example. The CBO is a respected broker of nonpartisan policy analysis and budget forecasts. The GAO is an independent investigator that determines whether public funds are being spent appropriately and can compel agencies to provide data and access to them in their work. Similarly, the council should consider separating the District's education research and auditing functions. I would recommend that the council change the name of the education research collaborative in this bill to the "Education Accountability Office" or something of that nature.

DATA GOVERNANCE AND DATA INFRASTRUCTURE.

While I have argued that the Council-created entity should focus on conducting audits and investigations, there is still a need for program improvement research, as well as more basic scientific research in education and access to data by advocacy groups. A true research collaborative, much like the ones in New Orleans, Chicago, New York City, Houston, and Philadelphia would be important. However, it is not necessary or even desirable for the DC Council to create such an entity.

What can the Council do if it does want to support a true research collaborative and to make data available to other stakeholders? A research collaborative would require multiple funding

sources for independence and sustainability. Research alliances in Chicago, New Orleans, Houston, and New York receive much of their funding from private philanthropies. As in those cities, DC taxpayers don't have to do all the work here. The most appropriate role for the council would not be to create the collaborative but to provide the data infrastructure that would enable a research collaborative to thrive. The council should create a pure data governance entity to warehouse, maintain, and share data with qualified requestors—basically a DC education data center. This would not only create conditions for the research collaborative to be successful, but would facilitate all of the education data uses I highlighted earlier in my testimony.

A DC education data center could provide various education agencies, such as OSSE and DCPS, with better ways to archive, store, and use their own data. Researchers and other qualified stakeholders, including the proposed education accountability office, as well as journalists from institutions like the *Washington Post* or WAMU, would have a one-stop shop for obtaining data for legitimate purposes. The center would act on behalf of the DC's education agencies to screen data requests, translate privacy laws to data users, execute data use agreements, and oversee data destruction at the completion of data use agreements. In fact, OSSE and DCPS already do this reasonably well, but perhaps there are more efficient ways to accomplish these tasks, such as contracting with dedicated experts so the agencies don't duplicate each other's work.

NORTH CAROLINA'S EDUCATION DATA CENTER.

A good example of how this works in practice is the North Carolina Education Data Center housed at Duke University. For nearly 20 years, the center has maintained and updated a set of data files and procedures for screening data requests. To cover costs associated with this work, the center charges data requestors a fee to access the data. Therefore, the center is a largely self-sustaining entity, with just a few private foundation grants and minimal government support over the past two decades.

It is also a model that is well-respected throughout the research community. Possibly hundreds of doctoral dissertations and peer-reviewed journal articles have been produced using records from the North Carolina Data Center's archives. Ask any education policy researcher about the state of knowledge in the field and where the data come from and they will list North Carolina along with just a handful of states—Florida, Texas, and more recently, Massachusetts and Tennessee—as those being the nation's education laboratories. It's only a minor

overstatement to say that everything we know about education comes from North Carolina. I believe the DC's rich landscape of educational innovation in both the charter and traditional sector would propel our "state" to the top of this list.

RECOMMENDATIONS: CREATE A DC EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE AND A DC EDUCATION DATA CENTER.

Thank you for inviting me to speak before the committees today. I hope that the examples I have described will help inform your markup of this important legislation. In sum, I recommend that the council create two separate entities; an education accountability office, and a DC education data center. I look forward to responding to your questions.