



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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How to Make Public Charter School Finances More Transparent

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Legislation proposed by the DC Council to expand access to financial records for charter schools that contract with management companies will help prevent fiscal mismanagement and is a step in the right direction. Yet, a lot more could be done to improve public access and transparency of one of the fastest growing parts of the DC budget, as DCFPI testified this week.

Charter schools serve over 44 percent of all public school students in the District and are funded with over \$600 million in local resources. This makes it critical that the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) – the entity responsible for authorizing DC charter schools – has sufficient information at their disposal to conduct adequate oversight of all charter schools.

The proposed bill – The Public Charter School Fiscal Transparency Amendment Act of 2015— would allow PCSB the legal authority to access financial records and contracts of school management companies and better defines what constitutes conflict of interest transactions.

DCFPI supports these measures, and we hope the conversation about charter school fiscal transparency continues beyond this particular bill. PCSB and the DC Council should consider additional recommendations for improving the fiscal management and oversight of DC's public charter school sector. This would include, for example:

- Offering a more careful accounting of capital costs for each charter school.
- Providing a clear list of which schools are financially high-performing or low-performing.
- Making individual charter local educational agencies subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) rules.
- Creating a uniform framework for presenting budget information for DCPS and charter schools.

These steps would help parents and policymakers better understand the way schools make funding and governance decisions.

Ultimately, all publicly funded institutions should be subject to the same levels of scrutiny and oversight, particularly when it comes to public schools. You can read DCFPI's full testimony [here](#).