



**TESTIMONY OF SOUMYA BHAT, EDUCATION FINANCE AND POLICY ANALYST
DC FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE**

**At the FY 2013 Performance Oversight Hearing for the
Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
February 24, 2014**

Chairman Catania and members of the Committee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Soumya Bhat, and I am the Education Finance and Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI engages in research and public education on the fiscal and economic health of the District of Columbia, with a particular emphasis on policies that affect low- and moderate-income residents.

I would like to focus my testimony on the importance of continuing to build a culture of open data and transparency at OSSE. The agency plays a significant role in collecting and reporting data on a range of education programs and services from early learning through adult education. In the past year, OSSE has made several gains in terms of better transparency and greater accessibility of the information they house, and DCFPI would like to see additional progress made over the next year.

The Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System, or more commonly referred to as SLED, is OSSE's tracking system for standardized data on enrollment and student demographics across the District's education programs. SLED can be used to inform education policy decisions of the mayor and Council. But, we feel this great source of information is not adequately accessible to the larger public and we urge OSSE to develop a more systemic, streamlined way to respond to data requests in a timely fashion.

OSSE has certainly made strides in the right direction – for example, the new Learn DC website is a terrific user-friendly resource, whose development was informed by the needs of the larger community. Parents can browse the site for individual school profiles, which offer details on student enrollment, college readiness, and student achievement across all DC schools. Other sections of the site offer resources on health, child care and other family supports in user-friendly formats. While these offer helpful information for DC residents, it does not necessarily allow for a more detailed data analysis or to identify trends across a time period.

While open datasets are being released by OSSE, DCFPI would like to see this information shared in a more systemic, formalized way moving forward. Just this week, OSSE, along with other DC education agencies, released datasets on student movement between schools for the Open Data DC website. This type of access to information can help to answer the public's questions in the wake of changes to our school feeder patterns.

The recent release of "equity reports" for all District funded schools was another sign of progress. This resource offers city-wide education data to compare information between individual schools and between the traditional public school and public charter sectors, including student demographics, performance, attendance, suspension and expulsion rates, and mid-year mobility for both sectors. The reports build off school-level information already provided in separate places: the

Office of the State Superintendent of Education score cards, DC Public Schools school profiles, and the Public Charter School Board's performance management framework. One of the best features of these reports was the ability to download spreadsheets for indicators to conduct further analysis on your own.

DCFPI would like to see similar progress made to provide open data across all of OSSE's divisions. There is a specific need for greater transparency in the area of early learning programs, such as child care and pre-kindergarten slots across the city. For example, we hear anecdotally that there are not enough slots to meet the demand of the community, but do not have access to clear data from OSSE on the supply of high-quality slots. Open data would help to shed light on this issue.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer input. I am happy to answer any questions.