



Independent Research. Poverty Solutions. Better DC Government.

**Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director, DC Fiscal Policy Institute  
At the Public Hearing on Bill 22-0776, The District of Columbia Education Research  
Advisory Board and Research Collaborative Act  
Committee of the Whole & Committee on Education Joint Public Hearing,  
July 13, 2018**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and members of the committees, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ed Lazere, and I am the Executive Director of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to reduce economic and racial inequality and build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia through independent research and thoughtful policy recommendations.

I am here today to speak in support of The District of Columbia Education Research Advisory Board and Research Collaborative Act. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute, as a policy research organization, strongly supports the idea of creating an entity to conduct robust research that can inform education policy and practice. DCFPI supports the bill's goal to improve efforts to collect, organize, and streamline data on the District's public and public charter school systems. We also support the bill's goal to support research to evaluate the quality of education in DC, which can inform budget and policy decisions. Finally, we support the bill's proposal to create a diverse advisory board to ensure that the collaborative's research is relevant and actionable.

An educational collaborative is especially important given the District's major educational reforms, including mayoral control of DCPS and the support of a large charter school sector, and the fact that we continue to face vast inequities in school outcomes by race, income and geography. The research collaborative can play an incredibly important role in ensuring all children in our city's schools are provided the learning supports they need to succeed.

I am here today to support the goals of this legislation and provide several observations and recommendations for further improvement.

**Recommendations on the Education Research Advisory Board**

Bill 22-0776 calls for creating an advisory board to oversee the work of the education collaborative. The advisory board would be made up of a range of institutional representatives, like DCPS and the Public Charter School Board, as well as a number of community representatives. Studies of similar public education research entities in Chicago, New Orleans, and Philadelphia show that institutionalizing stakeholder consultation through a deliberately multi-partisan and diverse group of school reform voices helps establish a strong foundation of trust between education agencies, advocacy groups, and families, which in turn enhances the quality and impact of research and data collection long term.<sup>1</sup>

DCFPI recommends some changes to strengthen the diversity and capacity of the advisory board. First, we believe the advisory board should include slots for people with K-12 education research experience and people with experience in developing and managing large databases. The current bill has no slots reserved for people with this expertise. Second, we recommend that the rules governing the advisory board ensure that the community representation reflects the entire city. The community membership should include both DCPS and charter school parents, and it should include members who live in Ward 7 or Ward 8. Finally, we recommend considering an application process for non-institutional members of the advisory board, as some other advisory boards do, to ensure that the board includes members with relevant experience and interests.

Beyond the make-up of the Advisory Board, we also feel that there should be a formal and thorough process for the board to solicit public input on the agenda and work of the research collaborative.

### **Recommendations on Data Collection and Data Privacy**

This bill rightly calls for improved collection of data on students and schools in both DCPS and public charters schools. When local education agencies rely on incomplete data to make informed policy decisions, students suffer.

While it is important to take steps to ensure that the District has comprehensive and well-organized data, it is not clear whether this should be conducted by the research collaborative rather than the Office of the State Superintendent. OSSE currently serves as the main source of education data collection, and it is likely that the research collaborative would need to get most of its data from OSSE. If OSSE's data is incomplete or poorly organized, then the data shared with the collaborative will also have shortcomings. Therefore, DCFPI recommends that the bill should include provisions to strengthen OSSE's data collection, and provisions for data sharing with the collaborative.

This should start with an audit conducted by the DC Auditor to identify what is currently available from OSSE, where there are gaps, and what resources are needed to fill those gaps. This would create a roadmap for new OSSE data collection efforts and the appropriate resources to do that.

The research collaborative then should have access to OSSE's data under a data-sharing agreement. DCFPI recommends that data be shared at the student level, without de-identifying student-level data as called for in the bill. Requiring elimination of anything that could be used to identify individual students would likely greatly limit the data analysis that could be conducted. As long as the research collaborative's data-sharing agreement prohibits them from sharing data with others, access to student-level data should not be a problem.

### **Recommendations on the Structure of the Research Collaborative**

A final set of questions relates to the structure of the research collaborative. Under this bill, the collaborative would be incubated by the DC Auditor, and within two years it would issue a report with recommendations for its long-term structure.

DCPI supports having the DC Auditor incubate the collaborative and conduct an exploration of models in other communities. But we also think the District should move as quickly as possible to move to a permanent location for the collaborative. Our instinct is that the best structure for DC is to establish the collaborative as an independent DC government entity, with options to contract

work when needed. We think it would be helpful for the collaborative to retain in-house expertise to ensure the District's capacity to provide reliable measures of performance, use consistent data analysis procedures, and solicit community feedback. Having the collaborative housed inside DC government is likely to ensure that it is most responsive to the needs of education leaders and policymakers, and it also is likely to be the most cost-efficient approach. As noted, the collaborative should be given resources to contract out research when it lacks the capacity to undertake a given research project.

This could be accomplished through making the collaborative a stand-alone independent DC government agency, with the executive director hired by the board and other staff hired by the executive director. It also could be accomplished by making OSSE an independent agency and housing the collaborative within OSSE.

## **Conclusion**

The District could greatly benefit from a partnership between proven researchers and the dedicated educational leaders that serve our children. We recommend the legislation include democratic processes for choosing Advisory board representatives, ensure the Collaborative reports to a politically independent entity long-term, and resource the hiring of in-house researchers to staff the Collaborative. Through extensive stakeholder engagement, enhanced efforts to build capacity and independence, and sustainable investments in internal coherence and data management systems we can better determine what it will take to improve education for all DC students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick, M. (2009). *A New Model for the Role of Research in Supporting Urban School Reform*(Rep.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.