

DC Families Want Better Data and Research to Support School Reform

By Jarred S. Bowman

The recent scandals around school attendance and graduation rates were a powerful reminder that DC continues to face enormous challenges in improving school outcomes and reducing educational inequities – but also the fact that the information available on school performance is inadequate. It has shown that when education stakeholders rely on limited or incomplete data, students suffer. Whether through measuring learning outcomes, graduation rates, or attendance records it is essential that school reform in the District be driven using reliable data.

A bill before the Council represents an important step towards addressing the widespread disparities in data collection, management, and research to inform education policy. *The Education Research Advisory Board and Collaborative Act* would improve collection of education data and then support new research to inform policy and practice. The research would be overseen by a diverse advisory board to ensure that the research is relevant and that the results are trusted.

The District could greatly benefit from a partnership between proven researchers and the dedicated educational leaders that serve our children. DCFPI joined many others to [testify](#) in support of this bill at a recent DC Council hearing, and highlighted factors we believe are critical to the success of this effort.

Extensive Stakeholder Engagement Will Drive Meaningful Research and Data-Driven Reforms

In order to establish a strong foundation of trust between agencies, advocacy groups, and families, studies show that institutionalizing stakeholder consultation through a deliberately multi-partisan and diverse group will enhance the quality and impact of this kind of education research.¹ DCFPI recommends that the advisory board be designed to include parents across all eight wards, teachers and other practitioners, and people with expertise in education research and data management.

Building Capacity and Independence to Address Core Problems

To build knowledge of core problems facing our youth, the District needs to increase its capacity to conduct scientifically rigorous research. This in turn will require the District to gather data in a comprehensive, continually reliable manner and make that data available for analysis. The new bill calls for the DC Auditor to assess current data collection efforts and recommend improvements, and then create a research group to work closely with education leaders and practitioners. Because the Auditor plays an oversight role and is under the DC Council, DCFPI recommends that the Collaborative be placed within the Office of the Auditor temporarily and then become a politically independent entity.

In-House Staffing Promotes Consistent, Relevant, and Sustainable Educational Research

Education research collaboratives in some communities rely on universities or other non-government research entities to conduct the research. While this is a solid model, DCFPI believes it is worthwhile to first consider building the research team inside DC government, as an independent agency. This would enable the District to build a team of researchers with the most relevant expertise and create capacity to provide

reliable measures of performance, use consistent data collection procedures, solicit community feedback, and engage responsively with DC government education agencies. [The Lab](#), a team of academic researchers who work in the office of Mayor Bowser, is an example of how this can work.

For more information, please see our testimony [here](#).

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