

TESTIMONY OF DR. RAMONA EDELIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, D.C. ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2011

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, CENSUS
AND THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
PUBLIC HEARING ON
DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

GOOD MORNING CHAIRMAN GOUDY, MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM, AND OTHER ASSEMBLED
POLICY MAKERS AND GUESTS. MY NAME IS DR. RAMONA EDELIN. I AM
THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DC ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED
PUBLIC SCHOOLS, A MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION THAT REPRESENTS THE
INTERESTS OF WASHINGTON, DC'S PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS. I AM
HONORED TO COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO SHARE THE PROGRESS AND
THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON, DC.

HISTORY AND GROWTH OF DC CHARTER SCHOOLS

YOU MAY BE WELL AWARE THAT THE U.S. CONGRESS HELPED TO CREATE
THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS IN DC WITH THE PASSING OF
THE SCHOOL REFORM ACT OF 1995. THERE WAS ADMITTEDLY SOME
INITIAL LOCAL RESISTANCE TO THIS REFORM APPROACH BUT IN THE 16
YEARS SINCE THE LEGISLATION, LOCAL POLICY MAKERS, COMMUNITIES,
EDUCATORS AND PARENTS HAVE MADE CHARTER SCHOOLS A THRIVING
AND POPULAR COMPONENT OF THE CITYWIDE EFFORT TO IMPROVE
PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR ALL DC STUDENTS. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS
ENROLLED IN DC CHARTER SCHOOLS HAS GROWN STEADILY FROM A FEW
HUNDRED STUDENTS IN 1996 TO ONE OF THE LARGEST CONCENTRATIONS
IN ANY CITY IN THE COUNTRY. CURRENTLY, DC CHARTER SCHOOLS
SERVE ABOUT 28,000 STUDENTS, WHICH COMPRISES 38% OF THE PUBLIC

SCHOOL POPULATION; THIS NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE THIS FALL.

DC CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVE STUDENTS OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES, FROM 3 YEAR OLDS TO ADULT LEARNERS. DURING THE 2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR, 87% OF CHARTER SCHOOL STUDENTS WERE AFRICAN-AMERICAN, 9% WERE LATINO, AND 3% WERE CAUCASIAN; 65% WERE LOW-INCOME, 10% WERE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS, AND 3% WERE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

FAMILIES IN WASHINGTON DC HAVE THE OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM 52 UNIQUE PROGRAMS AT 93 LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE CITY. OFFERINGS INCLUDE SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOCUSING ON BILINGUAL IMMERSION, MATH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, THE PERFORMING ARTS, PUBLIC POLICY, CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP, LATIN AND THE CLASSICS, VIRTUAL AND ONLINE LEARNING, MEDIA ARTS, MONTESSORI, COLLEGE PREP, AND A BOARDING PROGRAM, AMONG MANY OTHER OPTIONS. EVERY CHARTER SCHOOL OFFERS OPEN ENROLLMENT TO ANY DC RESIDENT, REGARDLESS OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD OR PREVIOUS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. SPACES ARE AVAILABLE ON A FIRST-COME-FIRST-SERVED BASIS AND WHEN THERE ARE MORE STUDENTS INTERESTED IN A SCHOOL THAN THERE ARE SPACES AVAILABLE, CHARTER SCHOOLS MUST HOLD A LOTTERY SO THAT EVERY STUDENT HAS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE SPACES. THE DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD, THE CITY'S INDEPENDENT CHARTER AUTHORIZER, RECENTLY ACCEPTED 19 APPLICATIONS TO OPEN NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR FALL 2012. ALTHOUGH PARENT INTEREST AND DEMAND REMAIN HIGH, THE GROWTH IN CHARTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES HAS BEGUN TO MEET DEMAND, SUCH THAT THERE ARE FAR FEWER WAITING LISTS NOW THAN THERE WERE IN YEARS PAST.

CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

FROM THE BEGINNING, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE GREATER AUTONOMY AFFORDED CHARTER SCHOOLS CAME WITH THE PRICE OF GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERFORMANCE.

WE SEE THE EVIDENCE OF WHAT THESE CHARTER SCHOOL OPTIONS HAVE MEANT TO STUDENTS THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE RESTRICTED TO THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS. WE HAVE SEEN STUDENTS COME FROM ONE, TWO OR THREE GRADE LEVELS BEHIND IN ONE SCHOOL YEAR. WE HAVE SEEN STUDENTS EXCEL FAR BEYOND THEIR GRADE LEVEL AND TAKE PART IN EXPERIENCES THEY NEVER IMAGINED POSSIBLE. WE HAVE HEARD TESTIMONY FROM YOUNG, AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINO MALE STUDENTS WHO HAVE SAID THEY WOULD NOT BE ALIVE, MUCH LESS GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND GOING ON TO COLLEGE WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN SCHOLARSHIPS. EVERY JUNE WE WITNESS AT LEAST 90% OF THE SENIORS AT THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY IN SE, WASHINGTON, MATH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, FRIENDSHIP COLLEGIATE AND CESAR CHAVEZ IN NE, AND MAYA ANGELOU AND HOSPITALITY HIGH IN NW GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL. LAST YEAR MORE THAN 750 STUDENTS ACCEPTED MORE THAN 15 MILLION DOLLARS IN SCHOLARSHIPS; MANY OF THEM WERE THE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILIES TO GO TO COLLEGE AND MANY TOOK WITH THEM MORE THAN \$100,000. THESE ARE STATISTICS WE CAN SUPPORT AND PERPETUATE FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

WHILE IT'S FINE TO CELEBRATE THE GOOD NEWS, WE DON'T EXPECT ANYONE IN THIS CITY TO BELIEVE WE HAVE ACHIEVED ALL WE CAN. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL OPERATIONS ARE CONTINUOUSLY EVALUATED, BEST PRACTICES ARE SHARED AND SCHOOLS THAT ARE MEDIOCRE OR UNDER-PERFORMING ARE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO MEASURE UP TO INCREASINGLY HIGH STANDARDS AT THE LOCAL AND

NATIONAL LEVELS. CHARTER SCHOOLS THAT FAIL TO MEET THE STANDARDS WILL BE CLOSED BY THE DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD. IN FACT, TWENTY-FOUR CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE CLOSED SINCE 1998. THE DC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD CONTINUES TO REFINE ITS ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM AND HAS RECENTLY BEGUN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK THAT WILL ENABLE BOARD MEMBERS TO EVALUATE CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AGAINST COMMON MEASURES. IT WILL BETTER ENABLE ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS AND WILL DRIVE EVEN GREATER ACHIEVEMENT FOR STUDENTS.

UNDER THE ABLE LEADERSHIP OF OUR NEW MAYOR, VINCENT GRAY, WE ARE NOW COMING TOGETHER AS ONE CITY TO LEVERAGE THE STRENGTHS AND ADDRESS THE WEAKNESSES OF BOTH SECTORS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THIS CITY, AS A WHOLE. WE ARE CURRENTLY AT THE PLACE WHERE THERE ARE MANY, MANY EXCELLENT PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR DC FAMILIES. OUR ONGOING WORK WILL BE TO ENSURE THAT EVERY SCHOOL FITS THAT DESCRIPTION AND THAT PARENTS HAVE THE PROBLEM OF TOO MANY GREAT CHOICES.

THE ARRAY OF OPTIONS, THE LIFE-CHANGING OUTCOMES AND THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY THAT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE AS A RESULT OF DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS IS AN HISTORICAL ACHIEVEMENT OF WHICH WE WILL SEE BENEFITS FOR GENERATIONS TO COME. WE THANK THE CONGRESS FOR ITS ONGOING SUPPORT OF THIS PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM AND CELEBRATE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND SUCCESSES IT HAS AFFORDED RESIDENTS OF THIS CITY.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH YOU THE PROGRESS
AND THE PROMISE OF DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS. I AM HAPPY TO
ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.