

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)**



Public Roundtable on  
“Literacy and the NAEP and PARCC Assessment”

Testimony of  
**Corinne Colgan**  
Chief, Teaching and Learning  
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the  
Committee of the Whole  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

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Zoom Video Conference

Good Morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council, and staff. I am Corinne Colgan, Chief of the Office of Teaching and Learning at DC Public Schools (DCPS), and I am honored to testify before you on the topic of student literacy, PARCC, and NAEP performance.

### The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

PARCC is the District's annual assessment of mathematics and English Language Arts/literacy (ELA), based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These assessments measure the knowledge and skills that matter most for students — understanding complex texts, evidence-based writing, mathematical problem-solving — all skills that lead to confidence and success in key academic areas. Students in grades three through eight and high school take these state assessments in ELA and mathematics each spring. These assessment results are one of several measures that together create a broader picture of a child's progress.

The data we are discussing today is from Spring 2021 and is compared to our most recent PARCC assessment, taken in Spring 2019. DCPS saw declines in both ELA and Math (about -5 and -10 percentage points respectively) after the COVID-19 pandemic. 35.4% of tested students scored proficient (Level 4 and 5) in ELA; and 22.3% scored proficient in Math. Nearly all subgroups declined in both ELA and Math compared to pre-pandemic performance, in 2019. Among the major racial/ethnic subgroups, Hispanic/Latino students saw the greatest declines in both ELA (-7.5 and -15.5 percentage points respectively). The Black-White opportunity gap has remained flat since 2019 for both ELA and Math.

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated a generational shift in learning and how schools need to be best equipped to support students' academic, social, and emotional well-being. Our schools and staff did a tremendous job in the 2021-2022 school year in helping our students come back to school, and we've seen strong progress from our students as a result. That is not to say there were not challenges, and this data comes as no surprise.

The results affirm our commitment this school year to go deeper in creating joyful and rigorous learning experiences to accelerate the success of our students. We continue to prioritize the needs of our students holistically: their academic along with their emotional and social development. Academic acceleration and building resiliency – in both students and educators – are multi-year efforts, and we are stepping into the second year of our strategic recovery efforts at DCPS. Our district-wide Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) helps us use data – both quantitative and qualitative – to ensure all students have access to a supportive learning environment, rigorous and engaging instruction, and additional accelerators as needed to support their overall wellness.

DCPS has been on an upward trajectory since PARCC was first administered in 2015 and our investments to strengthen systems and support our skillful and dedicated teachers will continue to help our students in learning and growing. I am confident that we will see accelerated growth in the future.

### The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Also known as the Nation's Report Card, NAEP provides important information about student achievement and learning experiences. DCPS is very proud of our performance in reading, which maintained our 2019 gains while the national average and almost every other urban district saw declines. In math, we did see statistically significant decreases in both 4th and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math, consistent with national trends.

In reading, DCPS saw our highest percent of students in Grade 4 reading scoring proficient or advanced. Grade 8 reading scores among Black students have increased since 2019 and are at an all-time high and reading scores among special education students in both grade 4 and 8 have increased from 2019 and are at all-time high. These results are heartening and show that DCPS' approach is working, even in the global crisis caused by COVID.

In particular, NAEP data reveals promising trends around the impact of DCPS' focus on literacy and recent acceleration efforts that include tiered supports such as acceleration academies and high-impact tutoring. Yet, we acknowledge and are urgently addressing the large opportunity gaps that persist among Black, Hispanic, and White students.

Math performance on NAEP showed declines, reinforcing what we know about how difficult it was for our students to learn math virtually. This year, we are continuing our acceleration efforts, helping teachers address student skill gaps in the classroom through small group instruction and the use of blended learning tools. Also, our Grades 6 to Algebra II students are using a new, highly-rated curriculum called Illustrative Mathematics. This curriculum was piloted at high schools in SY21-22 and we believe will result in greater engagement and learning.

The NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) results show how school districts are performing over time and compared with other participating districts. TUDA data demonstrates that DCPS is maintaining its trajectory as a rapidly improving urban school district despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to distance learning across two school years. In comparison to other urban school districts, significant gains in Grade 4 and Grade 8 reading places [DCPS in the top tier among peers in growth](#). Sustaining achievement in any grade or subject in the face of a global crisis is no easy feat and is a testament to the district's academic strategies and interventions, academic continuity planning during the crisis, and our proactive recovery efforts when schools reopened.

#### DCPS Acceleration Activities

In response to both assessments, we are continuing our targeted intervention and acceleration efforts. We know that real-time data analysis and responses are critical to providing rigorous, engaging instruction for students. This year, all schools are receiving training on how to leverage weekly data meetings to ensure teachers and instructional coaches can (1) effectively analyze student work against grade-level standards to identify areas of strength and areas in need of support; and (2) plan responsive whole and small group instruction that supports students to meet the grade level standards. This weekly analysis supports our district-wide MTSS work by helping teachers better understand the impact of their instruction on a day-to-day basis, without having to wait for formative assessment data.

This year, we are also continuing to refine our intervention strategies to ensure that students have access to tiered supports aligned to their strengths and needs in academics, social-emotional development, and/or attendance. So far this year, over 9,300 (over 17% of students) have received individualized or small group interventions through our MTSS process. Additionally, through support from OSSE, we have dedicated High Impact Tutoring (HIT) Managers at 10 schools – these staff members work directly with school staff, partner organizations, students, and families to support implementation of HIT, an evidence-based intervention and learning acceleration strategy.

When students first returned to school buildings in Fall 2021, we knew that it was more important than ever to welcome them back into a supportive learning environment. We invested significantly in training and resources to support our teachers and staff in this work, grounded in the science of learning and development. Overall, the number of students feeling loved, challenged, and prepared at school was the

highest ever in Spring 2022 across our schools. We know that providing a supportive learning environment and fostering strong relationships are critical to students' success at school; we are excited to further build on and strengthen this supportive learning environment this year.

### **Update on Literacy Efforts**

Since the last public hearing on literacy, we have continued to implement our focus on the science of reading with fidelity across all elementary schools. A key component of our early literacy plan is to ensure we develop educators' expertise. This summer, we successfully hosted our first DCPS Early Literacy Leadership Institute for instructional superintendents, school leaders, and instructional coaches. The Institute provided learning on the research base for the science of reading and its application to teaching and learning. This school year, we have expanded the institute by offering core institute sessions as self-paced, virtual webinars for educators and leaders to access. We are currently developing the scope and sequence for our second DCPS Literacy Institute next summer.

Additionally, each elementary cluster has been assigned a literacy expert partner to conduct ongoing professional development and coaching support during SY22-23. These partners include American University, DC Reading Clinic in-school coaches, and Literacy Architects. These partnerships are focused on developing leadership knowledge of the science of reading, data analysis, and needs-based small group instruction. The DCPS Office of Teaching and Learning also continues to provide school support to each cluster of schools through our elementary ELA and social studies managers via the Cluster Support Model.

Finally, we have encouraged teachers and leaders to further their expertise through intensive study of the science of reading either through the DC Reading Clinic course or LETRS. Currently this year, we have an additional 77 DCPS leaders, coaches, and teachers participating in our DCPS LETRS cohort. This will bring our total trained leaders to 166. By the end of the calendar year, we will have sixty more teachers complete the Reading Clinic course and by the end of the school year in 2023 we will have trained a total of 373 teachers, coaches, and instructional leaders in one of the two DC Reading Clinic programs.

We also continue to ensure that our teachers and students have access to resources aligned to the science of reading and best practice. This year, teachers and students will have increased access to content-rich, culturally relevant decodable books through our exciting [DCPS Readers Next Door](#) decodable text series. The books that comprise the DCPS Readers Next Door series are decodables, texts that help students practice certain sound-letter patterns taught as part of phonics. These texts support foundational literacy skill-building and allow students to practice newly learned skills.

We are participating in OSSE's literacy taskforce and are actively implementing Councilmember Pinto's legislation to expand literacy training to our dedicated educators.

In closing, I want to reiterate how proud we are of the progress DCPS has made because of intentional district-wide strategies and interventions; our talented educators, staff, and administrators; and the engagement of our students and families; and our commitment and urgency around continuing our progress and closing opportunity gaps in our district.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer your questions at this time.