

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



Public Hearing on

“State of School-Based Athletics in Public Schools”

and

B21-601, “District of Columbia State Athletics Consolidation Act of 2016”

Testimony of

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Before the

Committee on Education

Chairman David Grosso

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John A. Wilson Building

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Introduction

Good morning, Councilmember Grosso and members of the Committee. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to share some highlights of DCPS' meaningful progress towards the goal of providing excellent athletic opportunities to all DCPS students and to offer comments on the proposed "District of Columbia State Athletics Consolidation Act of 2016."

First, I want to thank this committee for its continued support for excellence in athletic opportunities for DCPS students. We certainly share your conviction that athletic activities provide a tremendous opportunity for our students to grow and develop outside – and inside – the classroom. Our data tells us that student-athletes have higher in-seat attendance rates, report higher levels of student satisfaction, and are more likely to be on track for graduation. Therefore, we are constantly working to increase access to athletic opportunities and improve the student-athlete experience at DCPS.

This Year's Athletics Accomplishments

To start, I'd like to highlight a few accomplishments of specific student-athletes and teams this year.

The H.D. Woodson Warriors completed a historic season with a 33-0 record which earned them the No. 1 final ranking in The Washington Post's boys' basketball poll for the first time in the program's history. The Warriors are the first DCPS team to finish with the No. 1 ranking since Spingarn HS in 2000, and are the first city public school to go undefeated since 1985. As a result, H.D. Woodson finished their season in the USA Today national rankings at No. 8. H.D. Woodson also saw continued success in football, winning their third consecutive Turkey Bowl Championship this fall. We congratulate Coach Fuller for continuing the great work started by Coach Scott.

School Without Walls HS also completed a memorable season this year, winning the DCIAA volleyball championship! School Without Walls claimed this title, defeating Wilson HS who has dominated DCIAA volleyball competition for over a decade. School Without Walls usually finished in the top three in the league, but this year was different. Under the new direction of Athletic Director Kip Smith, a strong freshman class ended the season with a 12-1 record. Many will consider this year a history-making season for School Without Walls and the student-athletes are sure to return next season with a strong conviction to defend their championship title.

Lastly, I'd like to highlight accomplishments of one particular student-athlete. Ayonna Williams has had a fantastic career playing basketball at Ballou HS. This all-star athlete has scored over

1,000 points and been awarded All-DCIAA honors three times, including twice as a first-team selection. During her senior year, Ayonna was selected to the senior all-star game and scored 42 points against a strong Bell HS team. Ayonna has not only excelled on the court, but also in the classroom. She has made the honor roll every semester of her high school career and is currently ranked third in her class. Through her hard work, Ayonna earned a full academic scholarship to Howard University, where she will continue to play basketball as a preferred walk-on player.

We are very proud of all of these students, their coaches and their teams' accomplishments.

Current State of Athletics at DCPS

DCPS is making significant progress towards being more responsive to students' needs, increasing female participation, connecting student-athletes to college, and ensuring fiscal responsibility. I would like to take the next few minutes to update the Committee on the current state of athletics at DCPS.

Listening to Students

First, we have created forums for students to express their opinions about their experiences as athletes and to ensure their voices are factored into our decision-making. This school year, we created a new Student-Athlete Advisory Board (SAAB) at both the school and district level. Each school's board consisted of one student representative from each sport and the boards met regularly, giving students an opportunity to share concerns with the school's Athletic Director and Title IX Compliance Coordinator. Additionally, each school's board elected two representatives to sit on the district-wide board, which met five times this year to discuss issues affecting DCPS athletes, such as practice and competition schedules, equipment, facilities, and college preparation opportunities. In our first year, we found that the participants were curious about how and why we organize our athletic programs the way we do. As the boards become more familiar with the range of issues open to discussion, we expect to get more feedback from our students on the quality and breadth of DCPS' sports offerings and resources.

Other initiatives started within the DCPS Athletics team over the last few years are now bearing fruit. For example, for three years, we have conducted student interest surveys. The survey results from Spring 2014 indicated a strong desire for a swim program, which made sense since many of our students do not know how to swim and have no prior experience with organized swimming. In response, we implemented "Learn to Swim" programs during the 2014-15 school year at ten schools that gave students a low-stakes opportunity to try the sport and develop the requisite skills. Students attended weekly practices, just as they would have during an actual competitive season. Instead of swim meets, the Athletics team organized three clinics to further prepare students for competitions. And our kids were all too excited to jump back in the pool this year! During

the 2015-16 school year, three additional schools joined the “Learn to Swim” program, allowing us to host a full competitive schedule. We anticipate this program growing in the 2016-17 school year, with Anacostia and Roosevelt already expressing strong interest in starting swimming teams.

Increasing Female Participation

Second, as we have grown our athletic programs overall, we have worked diligently to promote opportunities for our female student-athletes. Over the past two years, we have added an average of 2 new girls’ teams and 15 new female student-athletes at each of our 16 high schools with sports programs.

Creating new sports teams is the primary way of recruiting new female student-athletes, but we know there are other barriers as well. For example, we’ve observed that girls who play sports in middle school do not always continue competing at the high school level, even when the opportunity is available. This is consistent with other academic trends showing that students often struggle to make an effective transition to high school. We believe one of the critical reasons for this is that students lose key, nurturing relationships established in middle school when transitioning to high school.

To improve this situation, we have started collecting data on our 8th grade female student-athletes, which we cross-reference with the enrollment rosters of our high schools in the fall. The result is a custom report for each high school’s Athletic Director and Female Sports Liaison that shows all incoming 9th grade female student-athletes. The school-based Athletic Directors are then able to directly connect these students to high school coaches and encourage them to continue competing.

This year, 1,540 female student-athletes took the field, up from 1,303 two years ago – an 18% increase. Our focus on increasing opportunities for girls has kept our proportionality ratio below 5% for the past two years, meaning the percentage of a school’s student-athletes who are female is nearly equal to the percentage of students who are female. This is also within the range that the federal Office of Civil Rights considers sufficient for fulfilling our Title IX obligations.

Connecting Students to College

Third, we are working to ensure that our student-athletes are prepared for life after high school graduation. This year, we launched a series of “Prepare for College” workshops. The workshops covered a range of issues of interest to student-athletes, including NCAA eligibility, financial aid, scholarships (including non-athletic scholarships), and the recruiting process – for both scholarship athletes and walk-on players who want to continue to the next level. The sessions were hosted in every corner of the city at 15 of

our 16 high schools with sports programs. Washington Met and Luke C. Moore held a joint session on Luke C. Moore's campus due to their limited sports offerings.

There was high interest in the workshop series and they were well-attended. Following a marketing campaign that involved mailing invitations to our student-athletes, we had over 600 students and parents attend the sessions. Sessions were held at 15 of our high schools. Based on the anonymous survey conducted, at least 94% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to all questions on the survey. The survey results illustrate that this information is important and valuable to our student-athletes and their parents. We plan to continue these workshops each and every year.

Ensuring Fiscal Responsibility

Next, we are working to be more strategic about how we collect and use funds for athletics. We have taken three steps in this area. One, we have invested more money in hiring quality coaches. We increased stipends for athletic coaches across the board in fiscal year 2016. The average coach saw their pay increase by 51% from roughly \$1,600 to \$2,400 per season. For example, stipends for head soccer coaches at the high school level grew from \$1,820 to \$3,000 and for head basketball coaches at the middle school level grew from \$1,396 to \$2,000. The pay increases allow us to recruit better and more professional coaches and keep us competitive with surrounding districts.

Two, we have revised the process for collecting gate receipts at DCIAA sporting events. In partnership with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, we began using OCFO-bonded cashiers to handle all game-day ticket sales beginning in February 2016. These cashiers handle all cash and make deposits to the athletics team's Student Activities Fund the same day.

Three, we created a new database that has improved our ability to track and process extra duty payments for our coaching staff. Each coach must submit multiple forms of paperwork and demonstrate that they have up-to-date coaching certifications to be paid. In the past, all paper forms were passed between coaches, school-based Athletic Directors, the Athletics team, and various OCFO teams. This often led to payment delays to coaches. This year, we built a database to bring all forms to be processed under one roof. This has increased transparency between all stakeholders, so that everyone can effectively fulfill their obligations in the process and get coaches paid on time. We are still working to phase-in online records and reduce the amount of paperwork required for filing.

Status of Athletic Director Hiring

Finally, I would like to share a status update on the hiring of a new Athletic Director for DCPS. We recently hired a search firm (Witt/Keiffer) to conduct a national search and they have advertised broadly, identifying some very attractive candidates – both internal and external. We have been fortunate enough to garner a great deal of interest in the position, with over 130 applications to date. The goal is to begin a first round of panel interviews with the top 15 candidates during the last week of June 2016. The panels will consist of parents, community members, coaches, and school-based Athletic Directors. The final interviews will involve the Chancellor and Chiefs at DCPS. The target date to extend an offer to the final candidate is mid-July 2016.

Our Thoughts on the Legislation

Now let me turn to the proposed legislation. We have given careful thought to how this proposal would affect athletic programs in our schools, and we have some concerns we want to share.

Operational Overreach

We believe this bill would create an unprecedented and counterproductive expansion of the DCSAA into the day-to-day operations of LEAs in the District. While there is some need for role clarification between DCSAA and the LEAs, our research tells us that some of the proposed functions outlined in the bill do not reflect the proper role for a state athletics association. In every other state we looked at, the role of the state athletic association is to set standards of fair play, to set standards for coaches and sports officials, and to provide training and resources for member districts – while individual schools, leagues, and districts determine how to compete under the set standards and rules. Unfortunately, the bill goes beyond this limited scope to establish new and unusual roles for the DCSAA.

Facility Use Interference

We are particularly concerned about sections of the bill specifying a role for the DCSAA to manage the athletic facilities of hundreds of schools across the city's LEAs. We believe principals and school-based Athletic Directors know best how to manage the competing needs across their schools and neighborhoods to serve their students.

Unclear Language

There is also ambiguity about other issues, from how the proposed entity would compel private and parochial schools' compliance to the composition of the association's membership. We acknowledge that there has been and remains some lack of clarity around the role of the state vis-à-vis the LEAs' athletic programs here in the District, but we are not convinced that creating a new state-level entity with increased authority over the day-to-day operations of our sports programs is necessarily a solution. There are good examples of voluntary, membership-based

interscholastic sports associations in other states. These associations exist primarily to support and promote member districts, not to manage them. We would be happy to work with the state and the Council to study the concept of such an association in the District. But this should be done in a thoughtful and thorough way that considers model arrangements in other states.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that having a broad array of sports offerings presents fantastic opportunities for students in our city to develop physically, mentally, and academically. We are working tirelessly to promote these athletic opportunities and to improve the quality of student-athletes' experiences. We still have much work to do, but are proud of the significant successes we have achieved to date.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I welcome any questions you might have.