

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



Public Oversight Hearing
on
“Attendance, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy in the District”

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

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11:00am
Live via Zoom Video

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Cinthia Ruiz, Chief Integrity Officer for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). I am honored to speak before you today and continue the conversation about DCPS' work to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism.

At DCPS, we want every student to feel loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life. To get there, every class and every day counts. Attendance is critical for student success, and we feel incredible urgency around this issue given the attendance and academic challenges faced by our students due to the pandemic.

Today, I am here to share updates on the work we are doing to ensure our students are learning in-person daily as we continue to navigate through and beyond the pandemic. We remain singularly focused on making connections with our families, learning about the specific barriers they are experiencing, and seeking to support them in a way that meets them where they are.

What Are We Doing in SY22-23 At a Glance

In order to continually improve our attendance results, DCPS is actively employing the following practices this school year:

- Targeted monitoring and support of attendance entry for attendance counselors and school-based staff
- Weekly Senior Leadership team meetings that focus on attendance data, discuss trends and root causes, and identify collaborative strategies to mitigate challenges
- Partnership with Attendance Works, a national non-profit technical assistance expert, to host an attendance professional development series to support whole school attendance strategies to reduce absenteeism, monitoring attendance and partnership support for school-based attendance staff
- Continued investment in our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support framework, including professional development, and a strategic, data-based approach to student intervention
- Pilot of new EveryDay Labs nudge letters to be sent to families directly
- Increased support for schools with high needs via our Cluster Support Model focus

Monitoring Data Trends and Actionable Steps

DCPS remains committed to using data to identify ways that we can best target resources to support our students and families. With our newly developed DCPS Data Analysis Center, within our Attendance dashboard, we can monitor up to date data points per school to better inform our practices and support. We are proud of the continuous work we are doing in the secondary grades, aligned with the 60/40 rule, which allows us to provide more meaningful intervention and support.

When we look at our data, we see that compared to this time last year:

- We continued our focus on accurate daily attendance entry, which remains at 98 percent.
- Our current in-seat attendance is down slightly from 88.6 percent this time last year to 88.4 percent.
- Our rate of chronic absenteeism has increased to 35 percent, compared to 33 percent last year at this time.
- The year-to-date DCPS truancy rate is 9 percent, down from 10 percent last year at this time.

We have seen an increase in compliance rates because of completing required CFSA and court referrals this school year compared to last school year.

As we review data, we recognize that attendance continues to remain low compared to pre-pandemic levels, and we are intent on continuing to invest deeply in activities which support our families in recovering from the pandemic's impacts. As I noted earlier, we have been intentional about providing an integrated approach to supporting students through our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) at every school. Through MTSS, school teams look at multiple data points – including attendance, academics, and behavior. -- to understand strengths and needs for individuals and groups of students. For example, a school that notes correlation between attendance and academic performance may arrange tutoring for those students - thereby providing academic support, opportunities for relationship building, and ultimately encouragement to attend school.

Immunization Tracking

DCPS is also tracking our immunization attendance data closely. We are working internally with our Student Health Services team to coordinate efforts so that we are supporting schools cohesively, gauging the impact of exclusions on attendance, and ensuring clarity related to attendance coding at the school level. We have conducted joint training and developed key guidance for staff, such as a scenario-based flowchart to help inform which attendance code is the most applicable to use. We will continue to collaborate with our partner agencies to provide appropriate support for our families. A good example of such collaboration is that the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) holds weekly office hours for school-based staff to discuss procedures and referral concerns and share best practices.

Strengthening Our Relationships and Strategic Outreach

At DCPS, we know that we can best serve our students when we work in partnership with families, communities, external partners, and other DC Government agencies. We appreciate the relationships we have built with our partners in this work, in addition to CFSA, including the Office of State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Office of the Attorney General (OAG), Show Up, Stand Out (SUSO), Kininvolved, DCPS' Connected School Model, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. I would now like to take the opportunity to highlight our new and expanded initiatives.

DCPS, with the support of the Deputy Mayor of Education, expanded two partnerships late this fall. The first partnership is with Kininvolved, Inc. This partnership provides 40+ schools with access to a communication application that is designed to improve family engagement and increase two-way communication with families regarding attendance. The second partnership is with EveryDay Labs, which manages, on behalf of DCPS, issuance of nudge notices (via mail and electronically) to students who have a history of chronic absenteeism.

Last summer we relaunched in-person relationship building after a long hiatus due to the pandemic. Educators were encouraged to meet families in person outdoors and in the community – with all health and safety guidance considered. Families have been very receptive to this—from June to September, we saw 29 schools relaunch home/community visits with over 3,000 families reached. DCPS has completed approximately 4,500 total home visits so far this year across 31 schools.

We are eager to continue our work to connect with students and families and learn the best way to support them through any life challenges they may be experiencing.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you about this important topic. DCPS believes that attendance is a first and critical step toward accelerating student achievement and recognizes that every

stakeholder has a role to play. We look forward to working with community partners, fellow agencies, and the DC Council to ensure every student is given the opportunities and support they need to thrive in life. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.