



Testimony of Scott Goldstein
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Hearing on Teacher and Principal Retention in DC
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Good Afternoon. Today I want to start by talking to you about teams.

I'm a football fan so I'll start there. Have you ever seen a quarterback throw a beautiful no look pass down the field with a defender right up in their face? The receiver is right there- in exactly the right spot to receive the ball- just as they've practiced it a million times. Do you know when that almost never happens? When that star quarterback has a brand new wide receiver. In other words, even if the quarterback is a star and the receiver is a star and they both have been great independently, it's their pattern of practicing together and their relationship, but allows them to do great things on the field.

What about medicine? Cardiac surgeons who always perform surgery with the same team at the same hospital are 10 % less likely to lose a patient than surgeons who split their time between different teams at different hospitals.¹ That's tens of thousands of lives saved because of the stability of the team.

Research shows that on Wall Street if a company recruits a star securities analyst from one firm- it takes them five years to perform as well at their new firm as they were already performing at their past firm.² But if you bring in their whole team with them- they perform at their highest level right away.

What's my point? Schools are teams. No doubt a great teacher makes an enormous difference on the lives and outcomes of their students — but they don't do it on their own. They do it because they have gained expertise from fellow educators with more experience. They do it because they can communicate what's happening in the classroom to the parents and family members to better support students at home. They do it because they communicate between social workers or counselors and teachers to make sure their needs are met outside the classroom and the teacher can focus on helping them excel in academics. They do it when teachers have had the time to form relationships, to understand how each other works, to refund lessons together and to game plan to make sure they're serving every student to their maximum potential as a team.

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9552793/>

² <https://hbr.org/2004/05/the-risky-business-of-hiring-stars>

Things also work in the opposite direction. When a staff does not feel united in mission, when they do not feel like a team, when there is deep distress between the leader, and the staff toxicity can take hold it is very hard to root out. The staff are frequently gossiping and venting. The leader is constantly feeling the pressure to perform in a way that erodes their relationships with those they supervise. The school becomes obsessed with metrics and forgets about the humans that make the metrics move. We can all name schools where this happens and these schools are not serving students well.

One of the foremost expert on teams, organizational psychologist Richard Hackman said that if you want to predict the future performance of teams, you can't just look at their past performance, you have to look at two other things. You have to look at the well-being of the team members and viability or sustainability of the team. In other words- are the things they are doing to achieve success sustainable or are they burning themselves out and burning bridges with each other in their approach? Another way of saying this is, if you want a team to succeed on performance metrics, we should not set up systems that pit them against each other or assign them scores that convey what their value is through the evaluation system.

Schools are human organizations. They are teams. But too often we treat education as a game of individual performance where we measure educators based on the supposed "value added" that one teacher has on their own. We tell principals they'll lose their job if they don't improve their narrowly defined performance metrics in a short amount of time. But that runs counter to the science of improvement. It is not how improvement works and it's not how teams work. Organizations- and schools specifically- improve when people trust each other, when teammates know each other, when they share expertise with each other, and when they grow together to better serve their students. And this is why teacher retention is one of the essential foundations of whether schools succeed.

So where are we with teacher retention in DC and what can we do to make it better?

Educator retention is at the heart of EmpowerEds mission, and for the past seven years EmpowerEd has focused our full attention on studying and solving this critical problem that undermines student success. [EmpowerEd is in a unique place to talk about this challenge.](#) Over the past seven years we've been trusted by 25 DC public and public charter schools to assist them in improving educator wellness. This testimony combines what we have learned from our deep research, our regular deep conversations with educators about their needs and concerns and what we have proven works in our school by school work to improve retention.

While we are making progress in some areas, it is still true according to a WalletHub study released in 2024, that DC ranks below all 50 states in teacher retention and is still significantly behind the national urban average. That said, DC Public Schools is improving its retention of both educators and school leaders and getting closer to the average range. Across industries losing more than 10 % of staff is referred to in the literature as "dysfunctional turnover"- in that the costs outweigh the benefits. In the hospitality sector, of which education would be included- [above 20 % turnover is thought to be dysfunctional](#). With 21 % turnover last year, DCPS is right

on that line. However the charter sector is still experiencing turnover far above the urban average with a 31 % same school turnover rate from SY 22-23 to 23-24. We must implement solutions that specifically will support improved retention in the charter sector. Many educators need increased pay in the charter sector, and unlike most states we do not have by statute a minimum pay law for educators. We should also consider what supports these schools need to improve educator voice in decision-making, teacher career ladders and educator wellness support.

As I note each year in this venue, it's also important to level-set that this turnover is not due to higher transience in DC. More transient cities like NYC and LA have much stronger retention. And that this turnover is not "good turnover". In fact, the vast majority of educators who leave teaching are educators who have been rated effective or highly effective.

There are, however, distinct factors that produce higher turnover in DC- namely that DC has an education ecosystem that encourages both student and educator instability given the sheer number of schools and the two sector system. Many educators go back and forth from DCPS to charter schools. From DCPS to charter for more autonomy and flexibility and from charter to DCPS for better pay and union protections. That's precisely why we need the mayor and council's help in leveling the playing field to provide strong retention incentives across sectors and push our system away from the approach of the last fifteen years that has been built on a distrust for educators and their professionalism.

Here are the key things we can do to improve educator retention:

Better And More Timely Data

While OSSE has begun reporting data they did not report just four years ago, the lag in the data makes it much more difficult for the data to be put to more timely use. Every year when the school year begins, on the first day of school any principal could tell you how many staff that worked there last year still work there this year. With a simple email exchange or form, OSSE could collect that data from school leaders and report out within weeks of the start of school the retention rate by sector and- if they chose- by school. We should have these topline numbers- and data on any current vacancies- close to immediately when each new year starts. At the very latest this should be required to be publicly reported by October 1st. And then we must speed up the process of processing, verifying and reporting the full educator workforce data set so that we can see patterns and begin to address them. OSSE actually gives school leaders a short window to verify their submitted data- but at present it took a full year from the time school leaders verified their data until the moment the public could see it. We have to do better.

This data is useful for improvement. For example, in this year's data we we can point to a few critically important trends that we must address with urgency:

- 1) We need to recruit more Black male educators in the early grades

- 2) We need to recruit substantially more Latino/a and Spanish-speaking educators, not only at our dual language schools but across the city and in non-dual-language schools in heavily Hispanic neighborhoods.
- 3) A high rate of vacancies in SPED positions
- 4) A large disparity in retention between some of the biggest LEAs.
- 5) LEAs like DC Bilingual, Washington Yu Ying and Statesman Academy are doing a great job retaining first year teachers. What can we learn from them? LEAs like DC Prep, Meridian PCS and Academy of Hope are doing well retaining their most veteran teachers. What can we learn from them?

In a system that prioritized retention more, we would see immediate investigation by our education leaders into the current disparities in retention by LEAs and then convening LEAs with low retention with higher retention LEAs, outside partners and experts to implement improvement strategies. This district would provide targeted Educator Retention Funds to these schools to address this issue.

To improve our data collection, OSSE can and should also work to establish a common exit survey of educators across sectors (with room for LEAs to add their own items but with a common set of foundational questions) so we can have a cohesive data set on why educators leave. OSSE should also conduct a thorough review of educator certification requirements and potential barriers for Latino/a educators and the transfer process for educator credentials and experience from abroad and make needed changes.

Though we have made progress with our data, we have a lot of room for improvement.

A Focus on Teacher Growth and Expertise

We must also shift our focus and incentive structures from ones that prioritize “accountability” to ones that prioritize educator growth and expertise.

What can we do to promote teacher growth and expertise?

- 1) DCPS should also implement much more comprehensive induction and mentoring programs that set a standard for high expertise teaching across the system. In fact 31 states have required state-wide induction programs for all educators across LEAs, and many of them also require by statute that both mentors and mentees have a reduced teaching load.
- 2) Like many other states DC should begin paying for educators to obtain National Board Certification. The cost is only \$550 per educator. National Board Certification helps educators develop their expertise while earning a well-respected credential. Research

shows that national board certified teachers tend to stay in the profession much longer and can add 1-2 months of instruction per year.

- 3) We should consider a year by year expansion of co-teaching and providing co-teachers the time and space to build a relationship and work together to better serve their students. Co-teaching is well established to improve student achievement, and in particular, improve outcomes for students with disabilities.
- 4) DCPS should implement more authentic teacher leadership opportunities by expanding TLI implementation beyond LEAP coaches to part teaching/ part leadership roles designed by school staff and principals rather than central office
- 5) DCPS should better support dual language program educators with curriculum support, a focus on equity and inclusiveness in our dual language schools and a smart expansion of the program across the city- combined with its strategic focus on recruiting bilingual educators.
- 6) We should ensure all schools have SPED coordinators to take the bureaucratic load of special educators and allow them to focus on serving students and meeting their IEP goals.
- 7) Finally, DCPS can and should overhaul the IMPACT evaluation system and replace it with a system of Peer Evaluation and Review, similar to Montgomery County's model. Our system should be focused on educator growth, not educator exit. We must disallow the use of value added measures, which are not statistically sound and have been struck down by courts. If DCPS will not reform IMPACT on their own, the council should set up a time-bound task force to reform IMPACT with the WTU and DCPS. If the task force cannot come to consensus on IMPACT changes within one year, that would trigger giving WTU the right to negotiate the evaluation system as part of collective bargaining.
- 8) Finally, we must trust our educators in their formative assessment of students and allow them more time to teach rather than test. OSSE must work to reduce the influence of standardized testing. Just as OSSE is exploring alternatives to traditional class credit requirements in the graduation requirements, so too should OSSE consider alternatives to traditional statewide assessment. OSSE should prioritize adaptive assessments over static ones and move up the timeline for delivering results so they can be used for improvement.

Educator Wellness Supports And Increased Flexibility

We must ensure that a focus on educator wellbeing does not fade along with the pandemic. The nature of work has changed and education continues to be a significantly more stressful profession than most. In fact, data shows that educators are twice as likely to report

work-related stress as other professions. Here's what we can and must do to make teaching sustainable.

1. OSSE can and should budget the Educator Wellness Technical Assistant Grants over the four year financial plan. This work is incredibly effective and works best through community organization partnerships and will not be effective with asynchronous materials alone. These grants also must move up in the calendar year to allow full year partnerships. We should also prioritize the wellbeing of school leaders who are doing often impossible jobs and are tasked with too much to be able to balance work and life in a healthy way. School leader wellness is part of educator wellness and student wellness.
2. One of the biggest stresses on educators is the regular loss of their planning time as they need to step in and cover for absent colleagues. DCPS and the Council must address this by ensuring every school has adequate permanent substitutes. We should follow a model like Delaware- where the law requires 1 permanent substitute per 250 students.
3. The Superintendent should issue clear guidance to all LEAs that mental health is a valid and acceptable use for sick leave. While many states establish this by law as "sick and safe leave", DC does not have an official policy that makes clear that sick leave may be used for either mental or physical health, leading to differences in enforcement across schools and leaders. This should be an easy step to take.
4. ***We are closely following all of the flexible scheduling pilots happening across the city-*** including the ten DCPS pilots, the six charter schools who received grants from OSSE and the many schools utilizing their own funding to implement flexible scheduling models. While I don't have time to share about all of them, I would be happy to answer questions about what we have learned from educators about the pilots so far.
5. DCPS should go much further with a commitment to flexible scheduling for educators. The commitment so far is nominal. While the good news is that some outstanding school leaders are working around centrally imposed constraints to do what's right for their educators- recognizing the necessity- newer principals or those without as strong of a relationship with their instructional superintendent fear making the ask for more substantial scheduling changes limited to allowing educators more time to analyze data or plan- which both matter- but if DCPS does not recognize the need to give educators unstructured and unsupervised time back to do all of the impossibly long list of tasks they've already asked of them and to take a moment for themselves when they need it- educators will not feel respected by this approach.
6. OSSE and/or DCPS (and if not, the council through legislation) should create a teacher retention fund that provides targeted funding for schools with the highest turnover rates to utilize for one of the high leverage retention solutions such as: 1) Implementing

flexible scheduling 2) Adding permanent substitutes 3) Contracting with an educator wellness partner 3) Adding a full-time student and staff wellness coordinator

7. DCPS should invest in principal professional development to support positive working conditions for staff, the building of professional trust and human-centered leadership and invest in school-based educator wellness partnerships. They must also ensure the messages they send to principals don't create perverse incentives for them to communicate or act in ways that erode educator well-being.

Build a Diverse, Sustainable Pipeline

We must continue to invest in Grow Your Own programs to build a diverse educator workforce that better reflects our student population. As we build out the new DC Apprenticeship in Teaching program, we should ensure that this program is serving both high school students in their pathway through college and current paraprofessionals seeking licensure. We also need to better market and recruit for these opportunities.

When it comes to teacher diversity, we need a focus on recruiting more Black male educators in the early grades and we need to recruit substantially more Latino/a and Spanish-speaking educators, not only at our dual language schools but across the city and in non-dual-language schools in heavily Hispanic neighborhoods.

We could also match what other states are doing to recruit a diverse workforce. Virginia, for example, offers a \$10,000 yearly payment for minority students pursuing certification in shortage areas or CTE.

We should also consider other incentives and supports like on-site child care for educators with children, student loan relief for educators (which almost every state does on top of the federal loan forgiveness program) and housing support.

Wrap-Around Supports

Another way we can support our educators and students at the same time is to ensure we have better wrap-around support for students in our schools. We ask that you greatly expand funding and support for Community Schools/Connected Schools models to ensure students have the wrap-around support they need - and teachers can focus on teaching and students focus on learning in the classroom.

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While this testimony presents a wide-ranging array of solutions to address educator retention, none of it is beyond our capacity to do, and do quickly. We simply need the urgency and willingness from our education agencies and political leaders.

Thank you.