



Greetings Donna,

Thank you for meeting with our team to discuss OSSE's plans regarding the ESSA accountability framework and future school dashboard model of the DC school report card.

In processing the meeting we came to understand that public engagement about the framework and future dashboard will prioritize OSSE's views and desires for this tool over those of the people most affected by it. The conversation seemed intentionally limited in scope, opportunities for our voices to be heard were limited in time and questions asked were highly technical. Moreover, the assertion that it was not OSSE's intention (beyond this meeting) to consult educators but to simply focus on family feedback as the primary "consumers" was deeply disheartening – leading us to believe you view the ESSA framework and school dashboard only as tools of school choice and not as tools that can be used by all stakeholders for school improvement.

Our first concern is the engagement process itself. When we asked to meet with you and your team, we envisioned hearing from you for a portion of the meeting and then engaging in a mutual discussion around equity and community centered improvements to the current STAR Rating framework. What happened instead was a meeting where OSSE's preset agenda took up most of the time, with little room for our team to share our knowledge and experiences as educators in our city, and how that knowledge and those experiences could help improve our current school accountability tools. While we were asked a series of questions, lengthy and technically dense responses gave us little time or opening to actually share our expertise or genuine reflections. When questions were asked of us, they seemed tailored to significantly narrow the scope of our potential responses. When we were able to speak, most of your responses seemed geared to explaining why our ideas, grounded in our school experience with students and families, would never work – often without any cited evidence to support such claims.

Second, your team also continuously separated the conversations on changes to the ESSA framework components and scoring from the school dashboard conversation. While we understood going in that this was your intention, we (along with many members of the State Board of Education) have repeatedly emphasized that it is impossible for us to separate the two – because knowing how the ESSA framework scores will be displayed is essential to giving an opinion on what kind of information is best suited for it. We also believe that both the questions

posed in the engagement sessions and the follow up survey were so specific, jargony and technically dense as to dissuade real community engagement and feedback in this process.

Reflecting on this meeting we are faced with these questions: In your future public engagement sessions, will you work to communicate with the public in a way that is easily understandable and invites suggestions, discussion, and questions? Will you show that you value the input of all stakeholders by pausing to truly listen to all input without immediately putting it down? Ultimately the SBOE's vote in favor of or against OSSE's proposal will depend on how the school accountability information is presented and where it will be displayed. With this in mind, at its public engagement sessions will OSSE talk about ESSA and the school report card as two parts of the same conversation, or will OSSE continue to keep the conversations distinct from each other?

This brings us to the points you made about OSSE's intentions for dashboard users. As teachers, we have all used the various school search platforms the city offers to the public. The DC School Profile, DC School Report Card, and Performance Management Framework report websites are all utilized by teachers, and school leaders, in addition to families. As educators we use these tools to hold ourselves accountable to the communities we serve. In a recent [article on DC Line](#), Erin Roth with the Office of the DC Auditor said "Parents aren't the only actors who may be making decisions based on erroneous conclusions about proficiency. ODCA found that important trends in student achievement and growth can be lost or misinterpreted when education leaders rely on proficiency." Through these tools we are able to see where our schools are and identify what we need to improve. We imagine the dashboard as an even more helpful tool in this process. Some examples of how we see the dashboard being used by key stakeholders are detailed below.

- A principal may use the dashboard to identify community interests and how to use their funding to support or actualize those interests at their school. OSSE could share search data with principals so that principals could identify how to hold their schools accountable to community desires. For example, if given search data, Principal X could look at what families looked for when they searched Principal X's school and which of the other schools in DC families compared to Principal X's school.
- A teacher may use the dashboard when determining where they want to teach. They could use the dashboard as a replacement for, or supplementary resource to, sites like Glass Door. Teachers may also use the dashboard as an indicator of practices they need to improve upon as both instructors who help develop the skills of our students and colleagues who contribute to the culture of the school.
- A student may use the dashboard to research the programs that similar schools offer their students, then use that information to advocate for the programs they are interested in through their student government association, other student voice organizations, or their own, individual advocacy efforts.

With a dashboard truly created by the community, everyone can work together to hold schools accountable and help them provide what their specific communities want and need. It seemed

that OSSE's intention was to design an ESSA framework and eventually a school dashboard to be utilized only for school choice and not to be used by students, teachers, school leaders and others as a tool for accountability and school improvement.

As a team our primary priority is to increase equity in DC education, a priority we share with our respective schools. In our meeting you said that our suggestions for the dashboard categories did not "mean" anything because they could not be categorized as "good or bad." As we have testified and written about in [our DC Line op-ed](#), using accountability frameworks as measures of school quality breeds inequity. *That is not their intended purpose. Which is why we should do what we need to do for federal purposes, but focus our time and attention on creating a holistic view of school quality (as defined by our community) through a school dashboard.* Communities should be able to decide what they prioritize in their schools and how they prioritize them. While OSSE can provide context, it should not be telling families if a school is "good" or "bad" as these categorizations are subjective and only falsely made to seem objective through standardized scores. Using teacher retention as an example metric, OSSE could provide context for the percentage of teachers retained by including the percentages from previous years and including data on why teachers left (grad school, leaving the profession, switching roles, switching schools or districts), which they could gather from required end of year survey data. We know it will take time to build and validate such a survey, just like it will take time to build the best dashboard model, but it will be worth the time it takes to have an equitable tool that moves us away from identifiers such as "good" and "bad" for schools and families alike to use.

Finally, we will leave you with our asks. Firstly, we are requesting another meeting with you and your team as well as other educators who wish to join. We would like you to present again at this meeting, but limited to the essential context. We would like to facilitate a discussion following your presentation in a more interactive, public friendly manner. As teachers, we have the tools in our toolbox to ensure equity of voice and interactivity in how we solicit feedback. Secondly, we are asking you to publicly commit to your intentions for the summative rating – will you commit to not including this on the dashboard? If not, our feedback on the ESSA components will be different. Finally, though this is not an ask, we want you to know that we will be publishing this letter publicly. In our meeting we were struck by the realization that the agenda was already set and felt as though the limited scope of questions was designed to push the conversation towards a predetermined outcome, rather than open and genuine curiosity about the views and solutions educators might bring to this work. Through testifying, listening in to SBOE meetings, and meeting with your team, we have found this engagement process all too familiar. As many have noted, four years ago we went through essentially the same process. We are hopeful that through genuine listening, good faith engagement, and authentic collaboration we can ensure that this new effort produces a result we can all be proud of.

All the best,
EmpowerEd's Equity Fellows –
Sarah, Raymond, Maya, Cody and Armand