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JOINT PUBLIC ROUNDTABLE

PR23-0069 – “State Superintendent of Education Hanseul Kang  
Confirmation Resolution of 2019”

Before the Committee of the Whole

Chairman Phil Mendelson

&

Committee on Education

Councilmember David Grosso, Chairman

March 6, 2019 10:00 AM

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Dr. Yesim Sayin Taylor

Executive Director

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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and members of the two committees. My name is Yesim Sayin Taylor and I am the Executive Director of the D.C. Policy Center, an independent, non-partisan think tank committed to advancing policies for a strong and vibrant economy in the District of Columbia. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Confirmation Resolution for State Superintendent of Education, Hanseul Kang.

The D.C. Policy Center is a consumer of Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) data, especially publicly available school-level data. Since the appointment of Ms. Kang as the Superintendent in 2015, we have seen continuous improvements in the amount of school-level data available to the public and the research community. For example, we know more about school characteristics including basic characteristics such as program offerings and earliest and highest grades served, than we did before. There is considerably more raw data—again at the school level—on attendance, mobility, and discipline.

To be sure, the Council has played a definitive role in pushing for more data availability. Nonetheless, it takes a great deal of care to produce data that are reliable and can positively inform policy. This is especially true in D.C., which did not have any reliable data systems until 2008 and had to build from scratch. Superintendent Kang has been instrumental in increasing OSSE's data collection capacity and the amount of data available to the research community.

There is, however, more work to be done. Recent scandals, such as the misrepresentation of graduation rates, show the need to increase internal controls to ensure data integrity at the LEA level. I am hopeful that the D.C. Auditor's ongoing investigation of data integrity in education will shed a light on the improvements necessary to internal controls, as well as the resources necessary for OSSE to enforce them.

Importantly education practices benefit from evidence-based policies that can only be built on research that uses reliable student-level data."And this type of data can be the core asset that OSSE provides to the District.

OSSE already carries a heavy load: collecting data from multiple LEAs, filing over 200 federal reports in addition to many reports requested by the Council each year, and managing data sharing agreements with LEAs and federal agencies. This leaves little capacity to respond to requests from researchers for anonymized student level data. We have certainly been on the receiving end of rejections to data requests.

At the D.C. Policy Center, we would like to see investments in OSSE's data infrastructure that help OSSE streamline data collection so the agency can have capacity to make this data meaningful. This can be done by creating student linkages—from early childcare to employment outcomes, that would allow capable, qualified researchers access such data with little administrative barriers.

This would indeed be transformative. To wit, we can now study how in-boundary enrollment is related to neighborhood characteristics. But more interesting and informative is the link between student achievement and boundary participation decisions, and even

more informative would be to compare the course patterns of students who are in- and out-of-boundary schools and then correlate these with student achievement. We have no access to such data at present.

This seems like a lot of complaint for a testimony in support of Superintendent Kang, but it is intended to highlight an important point. While OSSE's data-sharing capacity has been limited, our understanding of what the agency can do, and what stands in the way has expanded under Superintendent Kang. She has taken great efforts to share with the research community what is now possible and what is needed for developing data capacity that can produce unbiased, reliable data. Superintendent Kang's support for the recent Council legislation to create a research practice partnership in education is a testament to her commitment to greater data availability.

And importantly, Superintendent Kang has provided vision and stability at OSSE. Stability in leadership is an important and a rare asset in the District's education agencies. And it is crucial to sustaining progress and is therefore a most welcome alternative to fits and starts we have seen both at OSSE and other education agencies in the past.

I urge the Council to support her confirmation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.