



D.C. POLICY

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Good evening, members of the DC State Board of Education (SBOE). My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing and vibrant economy in D.C. I am testifying tonight on the SBOE Committee on Accountability and Assessments' recommendations to follow up on resolution SR20-11. I will focus my comments on recommendations 1 and 12.

First, I was so glad to see recommendation 12, which suggests including an indicator for employment, career readiness, and college graduation. Understanding more about District graduates' experiences in early career could inform practices and investments to support current students and future graduates on a path to success. The D.C. Policy Center's recent report, [Measuring early career outcomes in D.C.](#), presented a blueprint of how the District of Columbia can collect more information about the early career outcomes of former public school students. Although finding these data is incredibly challenging, it is critical in order to find out what happens to public school students after their 15 years of pre-kindergarten to grade 12 school. Including early career outcomes in OSSE's longitudinal data system as recommended is essential to tracking them consistently for all of D.C.'s alumni.

Second, I would like this body to consider removing recommendation 1, which suggests eliminating the single summative rating of schools -- one of the key sources of information that parents use when choosing schools. In a recent survey of parents conducted by the D.C. Policy Center, 37 percent reported using STAR or school quality ratings and 28 percent used school report card data compared to half who mentioned word of mouth (48 percent) and school visits (48 percent) as influential sources of information in selecting their child's school.¹ School visits are powerful, but there is no way for parents to visit every school in the District especially during COVID – and word of mouth is important, but can be biased based on who is in your network.²

¹ Coffin, C. and Sayin Taylor, Y. 2021. *Exit & voice: Perceptions of the District's public schools among stayers and leavers*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/school-leavers/>

² Williamson, V., Gode, J., and Sun, H. 2021. We all want what's best for our kids: Discussions of D.C. public school options in an online forum. Governance Studies at Brookings Institution. Retrieved

It is also important to consider keeping the single summative rating of schools in order to be transparent about the data for all schools, not just the lowest-performing 5 percent as mentioned in recommendation 7. Providing this overall rating allows SBOE to recommend how OSSE should communicate the data to parents and other stakeholders. Before the STAR Framework, parents used other sources such as Great Schools to get a high-level comparison of schools. Removing the summative rating will not simply eliminate the demand for it, leaving others to aggregate the data in ways that are potentially misleading.

If SBOE and OSSE remove this single rating under their control, they would lose the opportunity to continuously communicate how stakeholders should use the summative ratings. Stakeholders may make judgments based on a single data point they value (maybe demographics or proficiency that many associate mistakenly as the most important indicators of school quality)³ without considering the other more holistic metrics that the STAR Framework incorporates such as academic growth, English language proficiency, re-enrollment, or absenteeism.

Instead of eliminating the single rating, DC SBOE could recommend other ways to reduce bias in the STAR rating and its use. This could mean adjusting the weights of indicators to reduce the influence of proficiency, for example. It could also mean including the overall rating for students who are designated as at-risk, for example, on the front page along with the information mentioned in recommendations 5 and 6. In addition, there could be efforts to educate stakeholders on the front page about how to use the rating or spotlight challenges and successes for each school.

To close, the need for transparent data is even more critical during the pandemic. Removing the summative rating makes it more challenging to track a school's overall trajectory in multiple areas and to identify where trends exist across different areas within a school that require improvement and integrated supports.

from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Discussions_DC_public_school_options_online_forum_Brookings-Report.pdf

³ Coffin, C. and Sayin Taylor, Y. 2021. *Exit & voice: Perceptions of the District's public schools among stayers and leavers*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/school-leavers/>