

Testimony of Helena Smolich, Parent at Capitol Hill Montessori @ Logan
OSSE Performance Oversight Hearing, Committee on Education
February 14, 2017

Good afternoon and thank you for hearing my testimony.

I'm Helena Smolich, a parent at CHM@L, and a Ward 6 resident. OSSE is set to submit its new Education Plan to the Department of Education on April 3rd, 2017. The period for public comment and community meetings will close by March 3rd. If meaningful input is the goal, which it should be, I believe April 3rd is not sufficient time to gather and review fully the views of the community. I urge OSSE to postpone the submission and give some more thought and time to complete a comprehensive plan, designed to set our students up for success.

Two overarching goals of the new Education plan are for DC to "become the fastest improving state and city in the nation in student achievement outcomes; and to ensure greater equity in outcomes for our students, by accelerating progress for those who are furthest behind". While both are worthy, I wonder if these goals are in step with the larger context of our city. It's generally acknowledged that academic outcomes are closely related to economic circumstances. So, from that perspective, is DC aiming to achieve the same kind of economic growth; to reduce and eliminate poverty and homelessness in our city, thusly facilitating academic growth of our students? In absence of such coordinated efforts, the new education plan could put unfair pressure on our teachers and students to treat the symptom, rather than the cause.

Proposed accountability measure is composed of 80% standardized test scores, 15% school environment, and 5% English language proficiency (for K-8 grades). The school environment includes attendance, in-seat attendance, and re-enrollment. Is standardized test score the most important measure of school's success? My family lives half a block from Brent Elementary, a highly coveted elementary school in ward 6. Rather than enrolling my sons at Brent, we make a trek across the Hill to CHM@L. And I can tell you, it is not because of the test scores. I worry that with this great emphasis on test scores, our schools will become corporatized, overly focused on their quarterly financial statements, and making the numbers look good, so to speak.

There are so many aspects of what makes a school a good school, which could be quantified and used for overall school grade. Student satisfaction, parent satisfaction, teacher satisfaction, teacher turnover, teacher education level, expulsion rates, reported incidences of bullying (and the reduction of the same), even the number of students on the wait list can be an indicator of the school quality. None of these are part of the proposed accountability measure.

I would like to end by reading a post from the list serve I belong to, that reflects a thought process of a parent entering the school system for the first time: "I'm curious about folks' thoughts on some of the charter or public schools in our area that do not seem to have as high of demandFor example, [Kipp Connect PCS] seems to be rated very highly per the Charter School Board system, but it had only a single digit waitlist. " Is this a good school? I don't know, but I do know parents look for far more than test scores when deciding on their children's education.

Thank you for your time.