



Chairman Phil Mendelson  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 504  
Washington, DC 20004

Tuesday, May 11, 2021

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on how the District of Columbia can continue to strengthen its education data infrastructure. We write as members of the District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative, the research arm of the District's new education research-practice partnership (RPP), to provide input on the data the city should consider collecting systematically and with efficacy to maximally benefit our city's students.

The RPP's research agenda will be established later this year by the 21-member appointed Advisory Committee established by legislation. We will amend our recommendations based on gaps between the priorities identified by the RPP's research agenda and available data. The preliminary recommendations we make today are based on our knowledge of education data in DC, the recent report by the Office of the DC Auditor, and conversations with stakeholders throughout the city, including our partners in the city's education agencies.

### **Ensure historical data are available to LEAs and schools for impact and improvement**

From our perspective as researchers and individuals translating research into action, data need to be available not only for retrospective research projects but for immediate impact and improvement at the local education agency (LEA) and school levels. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) already makes some historical student information available to educators, including state assessment results and Individualized Education Plans for students with disabilities. We think access to additional longitudinal data—such as attendance and prescribed interventions for currently enrolled students, including data collected by other LEAs in the past—can be useful to LEA and school leaders when considering possible interventions and evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies.

A data warehouse with standardized data and modern application programming interfaces (a common language that helps educational data systems speak well with each other) can facilitate efficient data exchanges between a modernized state longitudinal database and LEAs' student information systems. LEAs should have access to near-real-time attendance history, detailed state assessment data, and high school course credit information.

### **Priorities for additional data collection**

The auditor's most recent presentation to the State Board of Education (the April 7, 2021, working session) included three recommendations for additional data collections that we agree can support strong future research and evaluation: information about student supports and interventions, additional teacher data, and high school course information.

Student support data could include interventions assigned to students (at both the school level, such as an extended school day, and the student level, such as tutoring, self-monitoring, or participation in the Lexia PowerUp Literacy program), the dosage level of those interventions (e.g., 15 minutes daily, one hour weekly, or one home visit quarterly), and, when present, staff assigned to administer the intervention. These data would be useful to understand which student supports have the greatest academic and social-emotional impacts for students experiencing various challenges.

Additional teacher information could include teacher-student linkages by subject for all grades, teacher demographics (including race or ethnicity and in-field status), and teacher attendance. These data would support studies of important questions about teacher turnover, teacher effectiveness, and teacher diversity.

High school course and credit information could include information on the courses students take (using common definitions across LEAs) and performance in those courses (credits and grades earned). Research shows that student grade point averages (GPAs) are predictive of many college and career outcomes. These data, when paired with the student supports information, could support research on strategies that lead to improved GPAs and the development of on-track-for-graduation metrics.

These data cannot be collected overnight. Many of these elements would require OSSE to work with LEAs to establish common codes (e.g., around student interventions and high school courses), which will take time to implement citywide. These elements may also require new data collection tools (e.g., through the purchase of state data collection and reporting systems) that ultimately feed into OSSE's state longitudinal database.

## **Common student, family, and educator surveys**

In addition to the collection of new or expanded administrative data, we also believe there could be tremendous value to the city by implementing common student, family, and educator surveys on a regular basis. Given that many LEAs already administer mission-aligned surveys, this could occur either through additional surveys implemented across all LEAs or by embedding common survey questions in existing surveys.

OSSE, LEAs, and other city education support organizations use multiple survey tools that often address similar topics but in slightly different ways that render the data incomparable. A common survey or set of survey questions can help the city better identify "bright spots" or shared weaknesses on important topics, such as family engagement, student physical and mental well-being, and principal and teacher satisfaction. Common survey data could allow researchers to identify links between school and staff environment improvement efforts and other outcomes of interest to the city.

## **Connecting datasets across District government agencies for research purposes**

OSSE, DC Public Schools, and public charter schools store a large amount of educational data about students. In addition, other government agencies collect information relevant to understanding the broader picture of students' lives and the supports the District provides from birth to adulthood. These agencies may include behavioral health, child and family services, employment services, health and human services, the DC Libraries and Metropolitan Police Department, neighborhood safety and engagement, parks and recreation, transportation, youth rehabilitation services, the courts, and out-of-school-time providers.

We do not propose creating one master data repository. Rather, we recommend the District explore mechanisms that would allow researchers to access data linked across agencies while protecting student and family privacy. Where applicable, the District should also ensure the unique school codes created at OSSE flow across agency databases where school links are stored.

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We conclude by again noting that the RPP’s research agenda—and priority needs for data to carry out that agenda—will be set by the Advisory Committee. We expect to augment these recommendations once that agenda is in place, and in the meantime, we pledge our collective thought partnership to the DC Council, OSSE staff, and others working to identify best practices for collecting new information about the District’s schools and students moving forward.

Sincerely,

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*Note: The signatories of this letter are individuals affiliated with the member organizations of the District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative. The views expressed in this letter are those of the individual signatories, not of their institutions. Institutional affiliations are provided for informational purposes only.*