

THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Advisers to the Nation on Science, Engineering, and Medicine

A Plan for Evaluating the District of Columbia's Public Schools: From Impressions to Evidence

**Committee on the Independent
Evaluation of DC Public Schools**

Division of Behavioral and Social
Sciences and Education

National Research Council



Sponsors

- The Government of the District of Columbia,
- National Science Foundation,
- National Research Council,
- The Spencer Foundation,
- The Diane and Norman Bernstein Foundation,
- World Bank Community Outreach Program,
- The Philip L. Graham Fund,
- The Kimsey Foundation, and
- The CityBridge Foundation

Committee

Christopher Edley, Jr., Co-chair, Dean, Berkeley School of Law, University of California

Robert M. Hauser, Co-chair, Executive Director, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council

Beatrice F. Birman, Managing Research Scientist, American Institutes for Research

Carl A. Cohn, School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University

Leslie T. Fenwick, Dean, School of Education, Howard University

Michael J. Feuer, Dean, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University

Jon Fullerton, Executive Director, Center for Education Policy Research, Harvard University

Fernando A. Guerra, Director of Health, Metro Health, San Antonio, TX

Jonathan Gueverra, Chief Executive Officer, Community College of DC

Jonathan Guryan, Associate Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern University

Lorraine McDonnell, Professor of Political Science, University of California, Santa Barbara

C. Kent McGuire, President and CEO, Southern Education Foundation

Maxine Singer, Senior Scientific Advisor, Carnegie Institution of Washington

William F. Tate IV, Professor of Education in Arts and Sciences, Washington University, St. Louis, MO

Committee Charge

...design a multi-year, multi-phase evaluation

... and in Phase 1:

Assess available data;

Develop preliminary set of indicators;

Engage with stakeholders, reform experts, civic leaders; and

Explore desirability, feasibility, and scope of a sustainable program of evaluation.

A Special Assignment

The National Research Council of the National Academies is honored to have been asked to participate in the city's efforts to assure that ALL the city's children receive the education they need and deserve.

The Committee recognizes the essential nature of the task it was given.



Committee Approach

- Distinguish among *intent* of reform, its *implementation*, and its *effects* on student learning and other outcomes
- *Tabula* [almost] *rasa*: reform models
- Test scores necessary but not sufficient
- DC needs [deserves] independent, sustainable, ongoing program of evaluation

Committee Process

- Solicit stakeholder views (two public meetings and other interactions)
- Review preliminary evidence
- Study context and history of DC education reform
- Consider other examples of urban reform
- Review literature
- Deliberate during -- and between -- 3 committee meetings

Contents of the Report

- Overview of history/context of school reform in U.S. and public education in DC
- Outline of initial response to PERAA
- First impressions of DC progress based on test scores
- First impressions of DC progress in key areas of responsibility
- Detailed model for evaluation plan and recommendations

Preliminary Impressions

- New structures are in place
- New strategies are being adopted
- Data are being collected...

... but are not yet sufficient as basis for judgments about effects of PERAA or guidance for future improvements

More Impressions

- DC Test scores are on an upward trajectory ...
 - ... but have flattened slightly during the most recent two school years
- NAEP data also suggest improved student performance in DC
- *But...*

... Definitive conclusions would be premature

Caveats and cautions

- The DC CAS scores provide estimates of mastery of specific academic skills, but do not *explain* the observed levels or trends
- Scores are averaged across the entire student population, and do not provide information on specific groups
- Student mobility confounds score meanings

Recommendation 1

DC needs a stable, independent program of evaluation that includes:

- 1- long-term monitoring and public reporting of **key indicators** and
- 2- a portfolio of **in-depth studies** of high-priority issues

Evaluation Priorities

- personnel;
- classroom teaching and learning;
- vulnerable children and youth;
- family and community engagement;
- operations, management, and facilities

Evaluation Design

- Rigorous scientific standards for data collection and analysis;
- Process for determining high priorities for District stakeholders;
- Attention to available resources;
- Independence and objectivity = credibility and utility

Recommendation 2

The Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia should produce an **annual report** to the city with:

- summary and analysis of trends in regularly collected indicators,
- summary of key points from in-depth studies of target issues, and
- an appendix with complete data and analysis.

Looking Forward

Infrastructure is needed to ensure:

- Responsiveness to city needs
- Funding
- Independence
- Stability
- Multiple sources of data
- Comprehensive and objective information to guide continuous improvement

Next Steps

Outreach and collaboration with:

- City leaders
- School leaders and teachers
- Community leaders
- Parents

Next Steps (continued)

Issues:

- Evaluation priorities
- Proposed design
- Funding Options

