



dc association of chartered public schools
strong schools ■ bright futures

Testimony of
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COW Hearing:
The State of Adult Education
and Adult Literacy Initiatives in the District
Room 412

September 24, 2015

**WORKING TO ACHIEVE A QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD IN THE NATION'S
CAPITAL!**

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Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Committee of the Whole of the District of Columbia Council, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony at this review of the state of Adult Education and Adult Literacy Initiatives in the District.

I am Ramona Edelin, Ph.D., Executive Director of the DC Association of Chartered Public Schools.

I would like to use my time today to focus on three central objectives:

- **The vitality and diversity of the alternative and adult education charter schools in DC, and the critical importance of having a diverse set of schools which address a wide range of student needs;**
- **The need to carefully and purposefully increase the capacity of chartered public schools as they seek to meet growing demand and support this clear priority of the District; and the willingness of the charter sector to be partners in creating a robust citywide alternative and adult education sector; and**
- **An understanding that national models can be useful, but must be tested for their appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency in a given locale, such as the District of Columbia.**

By way of introduction

Launched in May of 2004, as a nonprofit organization operating under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, the mission of the DC Association of Chartered Public Schools is to improve opportunities and outcomes for students by supporting the development, growth, and sustainability of **quality** charter schools in Washington, DC. The Association serves all chartered public schools in the District of Columbia. This year, nearly 39,000 students are enrolled in DC's charter schools – that is approximately forty-four percent of the total public school enrollment. We are the collective voice of Charter School Leaders in the nation's capital.

The vision of the DC Public Charter School Association (DCPCSA) is that the chartered public schools in the District of Columbia, catalyzed and supported by their Association in strategic partnership with others, will become the quality research and learning laboratory that is needed in the nation, to begin to answer critically important unanswered questions about the quality; demand, accessibility, and retention; governance; sustainability; and community development benefits of chartered public schools. This quality infrastructure is intended to support the Association, chartered public schools, traditional public schools, all students, families, teachers, school leaders and education policy-makers in DC, over time.

The vitality and diversity of the alternative and adult education charter schools in DC, and the critical importance of having a diverse set of schools which address a wide range of student needs:

DC has eight operating and one newly-approved charter school that provide adult and/or alternative education. They all focus on adult literacy; however, their visions, missions, and methods vary widely and the students they serve have strikingly different characteristics.

Following are descriptions of these schools, taken from their websites.

The Academy of Hope was founded in 1985 by two teachers who believed that education could empower those most marginalized in Washington, D.C. It was clear that people trapped in the cycle of poverty lacked basic reading, writing and math skills, and they needed to acquire jobs that paid living wages. Academy of Hope's mission is to **provide high quality adult basic education in a manner that changes lives and improves our community.**

<http://www.aohdc.org/AboutUs/MissionCoreValues/tabid/56/Default.aspx>

Briya's multicultural family literacy model integrates the educational experience for parents and their children. The school is a place where parents learn necessary English and parenting skills, and children prepare for future school success. Briya builds on families' strengths and provides tools and support for improved educational, economic, and social opportunities.

<http://briya.org/our-model/>

Carlos Rosario International PCS combines award-winning education, life skills programs, and support services to create a holistic experience. Our curriculum merges research on regional economic realities with professional field standards and is tailored to explicitly meet the needs of the local immigrant community. ESL instruction is embedded in life and technology skills, health education, parenting, civics, and workforce training. The School celebrates a long established local, regional, and national reputation for excellence and our programs are recognized as high quality and impactful. Thanks to the School's programs, thousands of adults have obtained high school diplomas; passed the citizenship exam and become U.S. citizens; gained the English skills necessary to help their children with homework; entered into careers and climbed career ladders; paid millions of dollars' worth of taxes; purchased homes; and

obtained college degrees and workforce certifications.

<http://www.carlosrosario.org/about/>

Community College Prep will be a place where students are actively involved in preparing for post-secondary education and workforce training. Our school will be a place that is welcoming, supportive, nurturing, non-judgmental, and, most of all, evidences the belief that it is never too late for adults to transform their lives through education. The adult student will be exposed to behavior modeling that can facilitate the behavior modification necessary for underachieving adults to transform their lives.

<http://www.ccprep-academy.org/vision.html>

Students at the **LAYC Career Academy** leave the school fully prepared for a career and college. To graduate, students have the choice of becoming a Medical Assistant, obtaining A+ Certification in the field of Information Technology, or earning six college credits (the equivalent of two Advanced Placement classes). Students can also start their college education by completing six college credits (the equivalent of two AP classes) through LAYC's partnership with Bard College, Trinity Washington University, and the University of the District of Columbia Community College. The Career Academy's program is grounded in positive youth development principles that foster skills like self-awareness, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and resilience. The school uses an advisor-advocate model, community building, student recognition programs, and social activities to create a school environment in which students feel comfortable and valued.

<http://www.laycca.org/aboutus.html>

The **Maya Angelou Young Adult Learning Center** (YALC) provides academic and workforce development to older youth/young adults (ages 17-24) who do not have a high school credential, and particularly those transitioning from incarceration. The YALC offers:

- Academic programs for students to make progress towards their high school diploma or GED,
- Workforce programming, offering OSHA 10 Certification and through Homebuilders Institute offers career internships that provide employment and skills training.
- Counseling and youth development supports that young people need to get back on the right track.

<http://www.seeforever.org/maya-angelou-public-charter-schools/young-adult-learning-center/>

Next Step Public Charter School is not a traditional school. Founded to provide at-risk youth with the tools and services they need to finish high school, complete the GED exam, and move onward to college or a vocational program, NSPCS pairs a comprehensive academic program with life skills education, workshops in parenting, and programs in career readiness and financial literacy. For students with limited English skills, or learning English as a Second Language, we do not take the traditional high school approach of English immersion, instead we help students boost their academics in Spanish and then transfer their knowledge into English which proves far more successful. For students who face extraordinary challenges, Next Step is truly the first step towards a new life.

<http://www.nextsteppcs.org/our-school/history/>

YouthBuild Public Charter School (YBPCS) is an alternative high school for young people seeking to transform their lives by re-engaging in their education in a non-traditional school environment. YBPCS prepares students for post-secondary education and the workplace by offering, in English and Spanish, academic, vocational and workforce development programs. YBPCS believes that service to the community is an essential part of the transformative process. Therefore, students serve their community through volunteer projects and by creating housing for low income residents in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

<http://www.youthbuildpcs.org/index.php/about-us/about-us>

The goal of the school, to be known as the **Goodwill Excel Center**, is to provide adults the opportunity and support to earn a high school diploma and post-secondary education while developing career paths that present greater employment and career growth opportunities. In addition to the academic curriculum, the Excel Center will provide a free, on-site drop-in child care center, transportation assistance and life coaching, while emphasizing a school-work-life balance through flexible scheduling, extended hours and year-round terms.

<http://www.dcgoodwill.org/front-page/goodwill-of-greater-washington-open-dc-adult-charter-school-excel-center/>

The need to carefully and purposefully increase the capacity of chartered public schools as they seek to meet growing demand and support this clear priority of the District; and the willingness of the charter sector to be partners in creating a robust citywide alternative and adult education sector:

DC is a city-state of stark contrasts: home to the most educated and the least educated, the wealthiest and the poorest -- and the academic achievement gap between its affluent White residents and its residents of color from impoverished backgrounds is the

greatest such gap in the nation. Quality of life, post-secondary education, and work opportunities, predictably, contrast accordingly. Adult and Alternative Charter Schools seek to meet the enormous needs of DC's least advantaged populations. On distinctly different campuses, one finds the gamut of desperate challenges: from homeless, disengaged youth reading at a third grade level while struggling with transiency, to twenty-somethings returning from prison with no marketable skills and society's harshest stigma, to frightened refugees from violent past encounters with authority, to highly motivated immigrants with specific goals, to young mothers illiterate in their first language who want their children to know success in school. Many of these students also have special needs.

A government that intends to remove these contrasts must assess its own commitment to ameliorating poverty and providing adequate social services to these populations. We would expect that government to also assess how one segment of problem-solvers who are doing yeoman's service in this regard – its adult and alternative charter schools – could build greater capacity. They need buildings in which to operate in order to achieve scale; and their students would benefit greatly from City Services provided to K-12 schools such as transportation, health and mental health services, and social workers.

In the nation's capital, an estimated 40% of early childhood through twelfth grade public school students have parents who are functionally illiterate – year after year, decade upon decade. The impact of this stunning adult illiteracy rate on pre-K – 12 student academic success is undeniable. It is *unconscionable*.

The Adult and Alternative Charter Schools are proud to be a part of the solution to these entrenched problems; and look forward to continuing and accelerating their partnership with the City to this end.

An understanding that national models can be useful, but must be tested for their appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency in a given locale, such as the District of Columbia:

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we would like to call attention to the fact that, while national models can be instructive and inform practice with solid generic research – they must be tested for their actual utility at a given time and in a given place. We urge you to be sure the homework is done, the assessments are relevant, the fit is real – before adopting or imposing standards, prescriptions, or assessments that are heralded because they come from national or international sources. We all know DC is unique.