Timeline of Events Regarding the Manipulation of Proficiency Standards for the 2013 D.C.-CAS

July 21, 2010: Upon the recommendation of the State Superintendent of Education, the District’s State Board of Education approves Resolution SR10-05 approving the Common Core Standards in English and Mathematics. The resolution states: “Whereas, the Common Core standards will lead to the development of a new assessment system, **aligned with the standards, that accurately measure higher-order thinking skills.**” [www.sboe.dc.gov]

July 22, 2011: OSSE approves $1.6 million change to its contract with CTB/McGraw-Hill (“CTB”), the District’s assessment administrator, in order to transition to Common Core Standards for the Reading & Composition assessment. [CTB/McGraw-Hill, Change Request #1411, Signed July 22, 2011]

Summer 2011: CTB recommends developing new standards – called “cut scores” – for the D.C.-CAS after it is changed to align with the Common Core Standards. OSSE later requests a justification for this recommendation. [CTB Memo to OSSE, “The 2012 Reading and Mathematics Target Blueprints: Implications for Equating and Cut Score Review,”]

August 22, 2011: CTB sends requested justification to OSSE saying, “**We have recommended that OSSE consider cut score reviews because of changes to the target test blueprints related to the adoption of the CCSS State Standards (CCSS).**”

**Reading Assessment:**

“Being explicit about potential changes to the Reading achievement construct resulting from the transition to CCSS is not simply a technical matter. Potential construct shifts bring with them potential shifts in interpretation of test performances, **including interpretation of proficiency level descriptors and cut scores.**”

**Mathematics Assessment**

“We continue to recommend consideration of a cut score review for Mathematics because these standards were established in 2006, under
very different instructional, leadership, and policy conditions. There is a fairly widely held view in the educational measurement field that performance standards (i.e., cut scores and proficiency level descriptors) should be reviewed at regular intervals.”

[CTB Memo to OSSE, “The 2012 Reading and Mathematics Target Blueprints: Implications for Equating and Cut Score Review,” emphasis added]

**August 13-17, 2012:** OSSE develops new reading cut scores for reading. 81 participants attended the cut score review. [Technical Report on the 2012 D.C.-CAS Administration]

**September 7, 2012:** OSSE approves new cut scores for Reading.


**November 1, 2012:** CTB requests $151,314 contract modification to accommodate the standard setting for the 2013 D.C.-CAS Mathematics assessment. The modification states

“For 2012-13 DC CAS Administration, OSSE has requested that CTB report Math scores to Common Core standards, rather than DC standards...After the workshop, and when test data are available, CTB will calculate cut scores...Working together, the group will choose the set of cut scores that best fit the Mathematics program, and will make adjustments to that set of cut scores (smoothing), if needed.” [CTB/McGraw-Hill, Change Request #1730, emphasis added]

**December 31, 2012:** The 2012 D.C.-CAS Technical Manual is released to OSSE. The manual contains a detailed description of the development of new cut scores for the 2013 reading assessment. Specifically, the technical manual states:

The cut score recommendations from the 2012 committees were reviewed by staff from the OSSE. In addition, the OSSE reviewed the impact data associated with the recommended cut scores: impact data are the percentages of students classified in each performance level, based on the cut scores. The cut scores, as recommended by District of Columbia educators, were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee and approved by the OSSE in August 2012. ... The new
Reading cut scores will be applied to all grades in 2013. [“Washington, D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS) Technical Report Spring 2012 Test Administration” December 31, 2012, emphasis added]

Note: The 2012 Technical Manual was not previously published on the OSSE website, and was posted upon the Committee on Education’s request.

January 23, 2013: Mayor Gray requests a retroactive approval for modifications to the District’s contract with CTB/McGraw-Hill for costs associated with the transition to the Common Core standards dating back to July 2011. The request includes $2.5 million for standard setting and cut score development. [“Contract DCGD-2009-C-0036 Modifications and Payment Authorization Emergency Act of 2013” as transmitted by Mayor Vincent Gray to the Council on January 23, 2013.]

February 19, 2013: Council approves retroactive contract modifications requested by Mayor Gray for standard setting related to the transition to the Common Core by CTB. [www.dccouncil.us]

Winter 2013: OSSE must license 127 new items from CTB’s test question bank because DC has too few Common Core aligned questions. [Email Correspondence between OSSE staff and the Committee on Education 9/17/2013]


“The 2013 standard setting for DC CAS Mathematics seeks to complete the work begun in 2012. Specifically, the DC CAS Mathematics Standard Setting will update the performance standards for Grades 3–8 and 10 Mathematics to align with the Common Core State Standards and OSSE’s updated expectations of students in each performance level. At the conclusion of this standard setting, all of the cut scores for the DC CAS assessments in composition, mathematics, and reading will have been updated to reflect the Common Core State Standards.”

According to the plan, within 5 business days following the standard setting CTB will deliver a preliminary technical report on the standard setting to OSSE. A final report will be delivered within 60 days.

[“Design for Standard Setting DC CAS Grades 3–8 and 10 Mathematics,” March 22, 2013, emphasis added]
April 2-4, 2013: CTB and OSSE conduct the first of two-phases of standard setting for the 2013 D.C.-CAS Mathematics Examination. According the standard setting plan:

“On April 2–4, 2013, District of Columbia educators will engage in a content sorting procedure to study the performance level descriptors (PLDs) and test items, and they will associate sets of items with each performance level. The items can then be translated into cut scores.”


An internal email specifies that the standard setting session involved 33 educators. [Email from Amy-Dement-Dorey (CTB) and Jeffrey Noel (OSSE), September 13, 2013] An in-person interview revealed that the process involved 5 CTB employees. [Interview with CTB staff, September 18, 2013] OSSE employees were also involved.

June 4, 2013: Councilmember David Catania, Chair of the Committee on Education, introduces legislation involving the issues funding, accountability, student achievement, facilities, and parent and student engagement among others. [www.dccouncil.us]

June 5, 2013: CTB reminds OSSE of the need to approve cut scores under the Standard Setting agreement. [Email from Amy Dement-Dorey (CTB) to Margaret Barco (OSSE), June 5, 2013]


June 12, 2013: CTB delivers a “preliminary peek of the impact data” for the 2013 D.C.-CAS. Impact data generally includes overall proficiency percentages, which would allow OSSE to see whether the percentage of students classified as “proficient” would go up or down. The impact data for
reading were scored using the new, Common Core cut scores. The scores for math were computed using the cut scores used in the 2006-2012 assessments. But CTB notifies OSSE in unequivocal terms that the cut scores for math would also be recalibrated for 2013. The email states:

“We recall that we did Reading standard setting last year, but the new cuts will be used this year (2013) and we still used old cuts for last year (2012). The PLs in math are based on existing last year cut scores. This is just for your reference. We will reset Math cuts in the coming standard setting (briefing book) on June 17.” [Email from Lianghua Shu (CTB) to Margret Barco (OSSE), June 12, 2013, emphasis added]

June 13, 2013: Councilmember Catania appears on NewsTalk with Bruce DePuyt and discusses the fact that on the District’s current proficiency growth trajectory, it will take 30 years to achieve the stated goal of 75% proficiency. [http://www.wjla.com/blogs/news-talk/]

June 13, 2013: Assistant Superintendent for Elementary and Secondary Education, Dr. Kayleen Irizarri is removed from her position. Previously, OSSE’s Director of Testing, who manages the administration of the D.C-CAS, reported to the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary and Secondary Education. After Dr. Irizarri is removed, the Director of Testing is placed under the Director of Data Management, Jeffrey Noel, who in turn reports the Chief of Staff to the State Superintendent, Jose Alvarez. [Interviews with former OSSE staff, September 6, 2013]

June 14, 2013: Councilmember Catania appears on The Politics Hour with Kojo Nnamdi on WAMU-88.5. He again discusses the fact that on the District’s current proficiency growth trajectory, it will take 30 years to achieve the stated goal of 75% proficiency. [http://thekojonamdishow.org/topic/the-politics-hour]

June 17, 2013: CTB and OSSE conduct the second phase of the standard setting for the 2013 D.C.-CAS Mathematics Examination in order to, “recommend the most appropriate set of cut scores for the program.” At the conclusion of the meeting, a formal recommendation to adopt new cut scores for the 2013 D.C.-CAS Mathematics Assessment is made to OSEE. OSSE is provided with data showing the impact of the new cut scores and, having been previously provided with the results can compare the impact of the recommended cut scores and the old cut scores. Under the cut scores recommended by
educators and other experts, overall student proficiency would have grown by 0.5 percent in 2013. Under the old cut scores, overall student proficiency growth grew by 4 percent in 2013. [“Design for Standard Setting DC CAS Grades 3–8 and 10 Mathematics,” March 22, 2013]

June 18, 2013: CTB instructs OSSE that cut score decisions are irrespective of any desire or decision to keep a “trend line” and that new cut scores ensure that results are reflected “fairly.” Specifically, responding to a question from Jeff Noel, OSSE regarding how new cut scores affect the trend line, Lianghua Shu, CTB says:

“[E]quating between the current year and last year is independent of cut score setting procedure. Purpose of equating is to place the current scale in the same scale as the last year, through common linking anchor items, and equating was done before setting final cut scores. After equating, a scale score 550 in this year equals to last year scale score 550, and student’s scale scores are not affected by different cut scores...This standard setting new cuts is to assure the test changes are reflected fairly.”

[Email from Lianghua Shu (CTB) to Jeffrey Noel and Margaret Barco (OSSE), June 18, 2013]

June 20, 2013: OSSE directs CTB to disregard both the standard setting in 2012 (Reading) and 2013 (Math) and use the old cut scores to score the 2013 D.C.-CAS which would show a 4 percent increase in overall student proficiency in 2013. CTB informs OSSE that new Performance Level Descriptors will need to be developed. [Emails to/from Margret Barco (OSSE) to Amy Dement-Dorey (CTB), July 20, 2013]

June 20, 2013: Mayor Gray delivers a “major policy address” on education. The Mayor says D.C. must ‘stay the course’ in improving schools.” [mayor.dc.gov; Washington Post, 7/20/2013]

June 23, 2013: The Washington Post publishes an editorial titled “Stay the Course,” praising Mayor Vincent Gray’s decision to avoid significant policy proposals in his first speech on education since becoming Mayor 901 days ago. The editorial read:
“Mayor Vincent C. Gray’s (D) first speech dedicated to education, delivered last week, contained no dramatic proposals or revolutionary changes. That is a good thing.” [Washington Post, 6/23/2013]

June 28, 2013: OSSE transmits the official “Sign Off Sheet” to CTB stating that the old cut scores are to be used for reporting the results of the 2013 D.C.-CAS [Transmission sheet signed by Margaret Barco, OSSE]

July 2, 2013: CTB delivers full 2013 D.C.-CAS results to OSSE. [Email from Glenn Gage (CTB) to Margaret Barco, Jeffrey Noel, and Tommy Shen (OSSE), July 2, 2013]

July 3, 2013: CTB informs OSSE that largest gain in reading is the result of Wilson High School not being included in 2012. Specifically,

“Note the biggest gain (8.8%) from 2012 to 2013 is grade 9 reading. This is mostly because Wilson School (466) students did not take the first day test in 2012. Wilson school students count for about 10% of total population. These students were classified in non-proficient category in 2012. The grade 9 reading PL would increase only 2.68% if Wilson school was excluded.” [Email from Llanghua Shu (CTB) to Margaret Barco (OSSE), July 3, 2013]

July 3, 2013: Margaret Barco, Director of Testing at OSSE, is fired. [Interview with former OSSE staffer, September 12, 2013]

July 3, 2013: The Committee on Education holds its first hearing on legislation pending before the Council. Witnesses include DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson, Interim State Superintendent of Education, Emily Durso, and Deputy Mayor for Education, Abigail Smith. [www.dcccouncil.us]

July 18, 2013: CTB requests explanation from OSSE as to why recommended cut scores were ignored. [Email from Amy Dement-Dorey (CTB) to Jeffrey Noel (OSSE), July 18, 2013]

July 30, 2013: Results for the 2013 D.C.-CAS are announced at Kelly Miller Middle School in Ward 7.

“Yes! - Mayor Vince Gray [Washington Post, 7/31/2013]
“We’ve come a long way, baby.” - Chancellor Kaya Henderson [Washington Post, July 30, 2013]

“Literally, I...I just got to let this out, right? Haters are going to hate.” – Chancellor Kaya Henderson responding to a question regarding the validity of reported scores. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/local/kaya-henderson-on-dcps-haters-are-going-to-hate/2013/07/30/376cc5d4-f943-11e2-afc1-c850c6ee5af8_video.html]

July 31, 2013: The Washington Post publishes an editorial titled “A healthy trajectory” lauding the purported gains in student proficiency on the 2013 D.C.-CAS. According to the editorial:

“The announcement of historic achievement levels by D.C. public school students on annual math and reading tests was accompanied by reams of numbers, bar charts and graphs. But the best encapsulation of the accomplishment was the fist-pump-punctuated "Yes!" from D.C. Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D). It was a reaffirmation of the reform of public education launched in 2007, a rebuke to the naysayers who want us to believe reform has failed and a warning to those who would interfere with policies that are clearly gaining traction.” [Washington Post, 7/31/2013]

August 5, 2013: 46 days after the decision to abandon Common Core cut scores, CTB transmits a “cut score decision memo” to OSSE. [Email from Amy Dement-Dorey (CTB) to Jeffrey Noel (OSSE).]

September 3, 2013: The Committee on Education requests that OSSE provide:

- “The roster of those individuals on the reading and math standard setting (cut score) panel/committee including any reports, notes, and meeting agendas/schedules.
- The “Cut Score Report” for both math and reading
- A breakdown of the cost of the performance standard setting/cut score setting process.”

[Email from Brendan Williams-Kief (Council) to Kilin Boardman-Schroyer (OSSE), September 3, 2013]