



Washington Teachers' Union

Amplifying the Voice of DC Teachers

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COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE & COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

PUBLIC HEARING

Bill 23-515, Statewide Educational Data Warehouse Amendment Act of 2019

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Testimony of

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Good morning. I am Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). The WTU represents over 5,000 active and retired teachers. We are dedicated to social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia and to improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate our students. Many of our WTU members live and pay taxes in the District and have kids or family members that attend DC schools. I am a DC teacher and DC resident.

I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to mention the on-going pandemic and this afternoon's Council Roundtable on reopening our schools. I understand the Council's constraints in hosting a public hearing. Yet, we live in a democracy and those impacted by the Mayor's decision to reopen schools should be heard by this body. You should hear from librarians who are being reassigned from high schools to cover CARES classrooms about the impact it will have on their high school students. You should hear from technology coordinators in middle schools, who will no longer be able to ensure their colleagues are able to learn and adopt new Distance Learning tools. And from Counselors who will no longer be available to students they have spent years building relationships with. And, you should hear from students and parents about their concerns for their safety and for their education.

As the WTU has stated many times, distance instruction cannot replace the experiences our students get in a classroom. We understand the social and developmental concerns facing our students in this distance environment. However, we do believe that teachers are doing an exceptional job during this pandemic, reaching and engaging their students, despite many technical issues and concerns. We should not disrupt the good that is occurring across our communities to implement a plan that may do harm to and expose to thousands of students to COVID-19.

The DCPS plan prioritizes our youngest learners. But, at what expense? Yesterday, during a press conference, the WTU learned of data points around the learning loss from last year to this for our youngest learners. The chancellor also emphasized transparency. So, I ask, what is the learning loss of our middle schools and our high school students? What amount of learning loss is acceptable for these students? What impact will the transfer of middle and high school staff to elementary school, CARES classrooms where they will not be providing instruction, that is being proposed in the Mayor's plan have on the academic and learning opportunities for our city's middle and high school students?

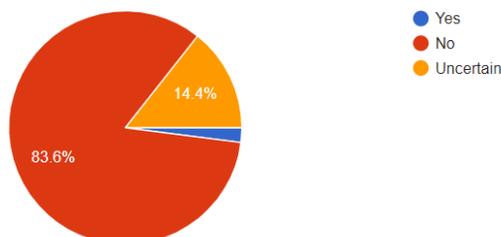
DCPS schools has emphasized their core value of "equity" in arguing for support for their plan. They have stated they've been negotiating in good faith and sharing data. It's clear that the WTU has a different definition for these terms than DCPS. We learned of DCPS's plans to spend \$24 million for every classroom to have a mobile air filter during yesterday's press conference despite weeks of negotiations around HVAC units and air circulation in classrooms. We learned that DCPS has a 40 student cap on distance learning classrooms – a number that seemingly violates our contract – during yesterday's press conference.

I ask that you work with the Mayor and Chancellor that they also remember that DCPS emphasizes core values of "Students First" and "Teamwork." The DCPS plan you'll hear about today has failed on these fronts. The WTU and teachers have learned details of the plan via press release – that is not teamwork. Moving middle and high school staff to supervise elementary school students is not putting those students losing critical supports first.

Trust will be very important if the Mayor’s plan is to succeed. Trust in our city is broken. A few weeks ago, the WTU surveyed members. Of the nearly 750 responses to a survey question asking “**Do you believe it will be safe to reopen schools to in-person learning on or before November 9?**” only 15 individuals said “Yes.”

Do you believe it will be safe to reopen schools to in-person learning on or before November 9?

745 responses



This response should be eye-opening for DCPS leadership. We again call on DCPS to engage with us and the community to design a plan that is grounded in three basic principles to open our schools. Any plan:

1. *Must involve those most impacted by the decisions, be data driven, and emphasize equity.*
2. *Put health and safety first.*
3. *Minimize disruptions to existing virtual learning and prioritize the socio-emotional health of students.*

Turning my attention to this morning’s topic. The WTU strongly supports **Bill 23-515, Statewide Educational Data Warehouse Amendment Act of 2019**, and I am here today to testify in support of the legislation. The bill would amend the State Education Office Establishment Act of 2000 to authorize the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to expand the Statewide Educational Data Warehouse to include additional information on teachers. We believe this effort is long overdue.

As I testified to last December, teacher turnover is a significant problem in the District of Columbia. Our schools and classrooms lose a high-percentage of highly-qualified teachers each year, a level of churn that is higher than other large jurisdictions. In its October 2018 report and its report update the D.C. State Board of Education (SBOE) found that **average annual teacher attrition at the school level in both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools is—and has consistently been—about 25 percent**. This is significantly higher than the national average and is higher than other urban jurisdiction.

And, we know that the impacts are most deeply felt in communities of color and communities with high percentages of students classified as at-risk. The DC SBOE found that the **rate of annual teacher departure rises with the percentage of students considered at-risk**. The District’s teachers leave schools with fewer than 20 percent of at-risk students at an annual rate of 18–20 percent while schools with the highest percentages lose almost a third of their teachers each year.

WTU teachers leave for a variety of reasons, including a punitive evaluation system that emphasizes testing. Ultimately, the WTU believes that the high rate of teacher turnover in DC Public Schools is the direct result of policies and procedures developed by DCPS administrators over the past decade. In a 2018 survey of our members, the WTU found that teachers leave the profession for many reasons, including:

- The lack of support to develop and improve teaching and instruction.
- Excessive requirements to spend time on paperwork instead of planning and preparation for classes;
- Numerous top-down initiatives that lack adequate funding or preparation;
- The lack of teacher voice in decision making; and
- A punitive and biased evaluation system (IMPACT).

In survey after survey, the leading cause of teacher discontent within DCPS is the IMPACT teacher evaluation system. Research has shown that IMPACT does not effectively measure progress being made by students from diverse backgrounds. And we believe that it gives undue weight to test scores as the main measurement of teacher success. Because of IMPACT and the high-stakes testing environment it reinforces, we lose some of DC's best educators to other school districts, creating an unstable learning environment for thousands of DC students who are prevented from developing the long term relationships with educators that lead to improved learning and performance.

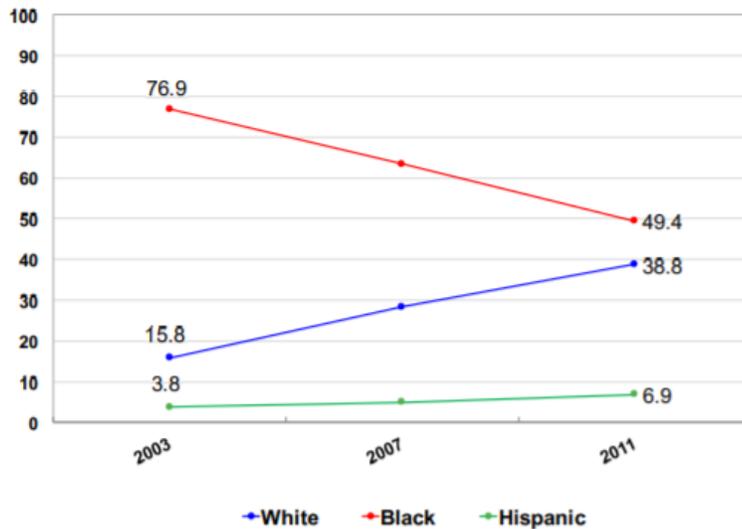
This is why the WTU believes it is time to replace IMPACT. It was designed and implemented without input from the educators whose performance it is meant to judge. In fact, DC Municipal Regulation § 1-617.18 prohibits DCPS evaluation systems from being a subject of collective bargaining, making labor-management collaboration impossible on this crucial element of any effort to improve our public schools. We hope to work with the Council in to finally change this law.

High teacher turnover undermines student achievement and consumes valuable staff time and resources. It also contributes to teacher shortages throughout the country, as roughly 6 of 10 new teachers hired each year are replacing colleagues who left the classroom before retirement. Research¹ published by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) shows that urban districts can, on average, spend more than \$20,000 on each new hire, including school and district expenses related to separation, recruitment, hiring, and training.

I want to take the opportunity presented by today's hearing to highlight research undertaken by the **The Albert Shanker Institute, endowed by the American Federation of Teachers**,² on Teacher Diversity. The data compiled by the Shanker Institute shows a remarkable decrease in the number of African American educators in the District of Columbia. Between 2003 and 2011, the proportion of the D.C. teaching force that was White increased substantially—more than doubling from 16 percent to 39 percent. At the same time, the Black share of the workforce contracted by a similar amount, from 77 percent to 49 percent, while the share of Hispanic teachers increased modestly. The shrinkage of the Black teacher force in Washington, D.C., is alarming in its sheer magnitude.

¹ <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/the-cost-of-teacher-turnover>

² [http://www.shankerinstitute.org/sites/shanker/files/The%20State%20of%20Teacher%20Diversity%20\(3\)_0.pdf](http://www.shankerinstitute.org/sites/shanker/files/The%20State%20of%20Teacher%20Diversity%20(3)_0.pdf)



The benefits of a diverse teacher force are not in doubt. There is reason to believe that minority students benefit most by having among their teachers individuals from their own racial and ethnic group who can serve as academically successful role models and who can have greater knowledge of their heritage culture. There is also reason to believe that all students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society.

The WTU supports the **Statewide Educational Data Warehouse Amendment Act of 2019** in part because it will finally allow us to collect, on a city-wide level across LEA's, the data we need to build and support a strong, diverse teacher workforce.

It is time that our school systems – each and every Local Education Agency – were held to **One Set of Rules**. Regardless of where a student attends school and whether that school is a part of DCPS or an independent LEA, she is entitled to the same rights as a student, including transparency and adherence to all local laws. For this reason alone, the WTU supports the Statewide Educational Data Warehouse Amendment Act of 2019. However, we believe it will provide much greater value to the District as we truly begin to collect and analyze the data that this act will require OSSE to collect and publish.

I'd like to, once again, thank the State Board of Education for their work on teacher turnover and urge the Council to continue supporting this effort to increase our understanding of the impacts that turnover have on student achievement and student wellness.

Thank you for your time today.