

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Public Hearing on
Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy in the District of Columbia

Testimony of
Cinthia Ruiz
Chief Integrity Officer
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
December 12, 2023
11:30 AM

Good Afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public. I am Cinthia Ruiz, Chief Integrity Officer of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). I lead the DCPS teams responsible for enrollment and attendance. Over the past decade I have worked to support schools' operational excellence, in both the public and public charter sectors in Washington, DC. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on chronic absenteeism and truancy. DCPS is committed to ensuring that every student reaches their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences. Simply put, students can only benefit from these experiences if they are in school.

DCPS, like school districts around the country, is seeing an increase in chronic absenteeism and truancy after the COVID-19 pandemic.

chronic absenteeism. A

a student’s academic development, but also a family’s overall wellbeing through providing access to resources related to health, employment, housing, and more. This model builds on the full-service community school model and is grounded in national research and educational best practices. Each Connected School employs Connected School Managers who coordinate with principals to connect school communities with needed resources.³

Connected Schools are Seeing Attendance Metrics Improve			
	<i>In-Seat Attendance</i>	<i>Chronic Absenteeism</i>	<i>Truancy</i>
SY 22-23 Last Year To Date	82.3%	52.2%	25.2%
SY 23-24 Year To Date	85.4%	45.7%	21.9%

Another strategy that DCPS employs with groups of schools are Sixth and Ninth Grade Academies. These academies are specifically located at Title I schools. The Ninth Grade Academies were established in School Year 2013-2014 in response to low promotion rates for ninth graders at ending comprehensive high schools, with the goal of increasing four-year graduation rates. Our Academies support first-time ninth grade students’ successful transition to high school, providing clear expectations and ensuring frequent feedback with a network of social, emotional, and academic personalized interventions. Ninth Grade Academies are led by Academy Assistant Principals and teams of teachers work together to analyze student attendance and academic data and design appropriate interventions. Through this strategy we serve students at Anacostia, Ballou, Cardozo, Coolidge, Dunbar, Eastern, Ron Brown, Roosevelt, and Woodson. Over the past ten years, Ninth Grade Academies in DCPS have increased promotion rates from 54% to 75-85%.

Like ninth grade, we know that sixth grade is a critical juncture in a young person’s life and that the transition from fifth to sixth grade can be similarly challenging. For these reasons, DCPS launched Sixth Grade Academies in eleven middle schools this past summer, to help students make a smooth transition to sixth grade and improve their chances of graduating from high school. We are excited to see this strategy already paying dividends. Students who are

