

*Council Hearing  
12.15-12.30*

**Testimony of Josephine Baker  
Chair  
District of Columbia Public Charter School Board  
Before the Committee on Education, Libraries, and  
Recreation  
Council of the District of Columbia  
February 12, 2000**

*Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:*

I am Josephine Baker, chair of the DC Public Charter School Board, and I am accompanied at the witness table by the Board's executive director, Nelson Smith. We appreciate having this opportunity to talk about the Board's mission and current program.

The Board took office just three years ago, in February 1997. Early in our tenure, when we were being urged to get schools up and running quickly, we adopted a motto: "We Charter Success." This wasn't just a slogan. It meant that we were committed to a careful process of approving new charter schools. It also meant that we would work hard, through a combination of oversight and support, to see that these schools attained the goals they set.

I am happy to report that we are making good on this commitment. While it is still quite early to speak of educational outcomes, because most of our schools are just in their second year, the early indicators of success are encouraging.

Of 57 applications received in three cycles, the Board has approved 18. <sup>172</sup> Twelve of these are already in operation, and most of those approved in this cycle will open this coming September.

Enrollment in schools chartered by our Board has grown rapidly -- from 2,027 last year to 4,473 this year, a gain of more than 120 percent. While the bulk of new students are still coming from DC Public Schools, the Board's schools have begun attracting significant numbers of students from private and parochial schools, as well as dropouts who had left the system altogether.

The organizational performance of the Board's charter schools has generally been strong. Monthly attendance hovers around 90%; first-year reviews found that schools had generally gotten a solid start in implementing their

programs; and each school has now produced an annual report including audits that demonstrate sound financial practices.

Of course, the schools themselves deserve the lion's share of credit for these developments. But the Board's efforts have helped set the pace.

In the application cycle just concluded, the Board explicitly encouraged proposals in which established local community groups would team up with national organizations based here. We also hoped to attract proposals from those ~~who~~ <sup>who?</sup> could improve learning opportunities in underserved areas of our community.

I'm happy to say that our call was answered. Among the schools approved this year are some impressive partnerships and innovative approaches. Sasha Bruce Youthworks will join with the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound program, which has produced impressive achievement results around the country. Paul Jr. High will work with the Kennedy Center to provide arts experiences for its students. Two of the city's leading economic development agencies, in Anacostia and Marshall Heights, are involved in the New School for Enterprise and Development.

It has been particularly gratifying that the Board's efforts have been recognized both locally and nationally.

Researchers at George Washington University's Center for Washington Area Studies reported that applications we approved gained high marks for "sophistication and comprehensiveness," and their interviews with leaders of our schools said "they consider the [Public Charter School Board] to be rigorous to a fault, but they also consider that board to be even-handed and supportive."

The Colorado charter authority has adapted the scoring rubrics we developed for our application process; the Board's accountability program was cited in a study published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation; and I am a member of the steering committee of a new national organization of charter authorizers, whose mission is to identify and promote "best practices" as more and more states create charter laws.

As enrollment grows and new schools come on-line, we will face new challenges and adopt new strategies. Yet our essential commitment will remain the same: to set high standards for approval of new schools; to make every effort to help operating schools succeed; but to hold them accountable for their academic, financial, and operational performance.

I will now ask our executive director to discuss some of the programmatic initiatives now underway.

*Sat., Feb. 12, 2002*

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*Pat. Institute of Mental Health*

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