

**TESTIMONY OF JOSEPHINE BAKER, CHAIR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER
SCHOOL BOARD**

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 25, 2002

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*Ranking Member
Mr. Fattah*

Good Morning —

Chairman Knollenberg and Members of the Subcommittee:

**I am Josephine Baker, chair of the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB).
I thank you for this opportunity to share the Board's views on the status of
charter schools. This testimony will describe the present and project our
vision going forward into the future.**

**This school year there are twenty schools on twenty-three campuses
chartered by this Board enrolling 7,700 students in grades pre-K through
adult education. These schools will continue to grow, for many have not**

yet reached the number of grade levels or the maximum student population allowed in their charters; we project enrollment to reach 9,100 in fiscal year 2003. This continuing increase requires more Board staff to provide oversight and address mandates yet to be implemented. The Board now reviews schools' contracts that exceed \$25,000, a task turned over to this Board by the Control Board that requires considerable time of the staff member assigned. The proposed increase in our appropriation for FY 2003 will also support our Board's development of our fifth-year review protocol and the implementation of technology that will provide significant opportunities for our schools and the public. In a conversation with Migo Miconi in 1997, he cautioned us to remember that our appropriation is "public money". We can assure you and the citizens of our city that we budget carefully and spend judiciously. The proposed appropriation and legislated administrative fees provide funds to authorize new schools and monitor existing schools and will total approximately \$1 million which represents about 1 % of the funding of the schools under our jurisdiction. We feel this is an indication of careful guarding of a public trust.

OK

We believe that the three "A's" are the components that work together in the charter concept. Charter schools are granted a high level of Autonomy and a high level of Accountability is expected. Every school has an approved accountability plan that articulates how the school plans to meet the needs of the students it serves. Our review process begins in year one

stop

with a self-study, which is followed by an implementation review in which reviewers use the same instrument to gather information about the school's progress in implementing its accountability plan. In subsequent years a combination of strategies are being used to gather information, which is then provided as feedback to the schools. A high level of performance is expected and schools exhibiting difficulty are required to execute a MOU that articulates what actions they will take to remedy the identified problem(s). Subsequent reviewers will look for the elimination of the these problems.

no

The PCSB has also established and implemented a rigorous financial oversight regimen that includes frequent financial reporting, independent expert reviews, internal control assessments, annual audits (as required by law) and enforcement remedies. Finance is a known area of difficulty for charter schools nationally, and the Board has a contract with an accounting firm that looks at the monthly/quarterly finance reports so that any irregularities or concerns will be "red-flagged" early.

yes

The above descriptions are a very condensed account of our oversight process. The goal of the Board is to honor the autonomy of the schools it has chartered, but to hold them accountable for results. Oversight of public charter schools is the responsibility of the chartering authorities, and the

expectation of the PCSB is that it will be held accountable for its performance in this regard.

The third "A" is Achievement which is the clincher of the three "A's". Each year the PCSB publishes a "School Performance Report" which gives a portrait of each school and its progress. Each school is described in detail and many factors that speak to the school's progress are shown. ^{stop} The attendance rate, for example is cited; we know that if students are not in

school they will not make the progress looked for by this Board and the public. ^{yes} [Not only are SAT 9 scores reported, but NCE or Gain Scores are

also computed which provide information about the amount of gain acquired by students in that academic year.] How much gain was made by students in reading and math and what percentage of students participated

^{yes} in this gain provides important information about how well a school is working. ^{stop} [In school year 2000-2001, there were some schools that made significant gains in their third year of operation. Though not at the 50th

percentile, the percentile for all students increased slightly from the spring 2000 average. We are seeing progress through other indicators and are looking forward to the reports of the SAT 9 testing which has just been completed.

^{yes} Research supports the fact that it takes time for changes to make a difference in the academic performance of students. In a recent report, the

Chugach School District in Alaska, a culturally and demographically different but poorly performing district, students moved from the 28th percentile nationally in reading to the 71st; and from the 53rd percentile in math to the 78th. This was not accomplished by teaching to the test but by using a redesigned system, and it took seven years to achieve this turn around. Achievement is the ultimate goal of the three A's and strong accountability with autonomy has the potential for making it happen.

Facilities acquisition continues to be the spoiler in the growth of charter schools. The PCSB oversees ten schools that are facing dire facilities constraints. ^{stop} A promising school, founded by seasoned educators, was unable to open this year and plans to open next year at only one-tenth of its authorized enrollment. Another school with over 300 students will lose its lease at the end of the current school year; ^{YES} several other schools have scaled back enrollments plans due to space constraints. Operating below capacity imposes a major financial burden on charter schools, and, more importantly, limits educational options for D.C. families. Appropriate facilities that are well equipped and safe are essential to provide an educational environment that is conducive to learning.

The establishment of the per-pupil facilities allowance for charter schools has been an enabler in the acquisition of space. The formula is based on the DCPS capital budgeting for schools, and this Board believes that this

method of determining the facilities allotments is flawed and should be reevaluated. The establishment of the Credit Enhancement Fund established by this committee in the FY 2000 budget has improved financing of facilities. There is an opportunity for greater use of this approach if more money is made available for the fund, and there is a concerted effort by the charter community to make lending institutions more aware and committed to support charter school facilities financing. We have encouraged the Mayor to consider increasing this amount in his proposal to reconstruct the "Charter School Revolving Loan Fund".

 **The DC Public Charter School Board believes that the independent public schools that it has authorized are indeed making a positive difference in public education of children in the District of Columbia. Our collaborative approach and diligent implementation of the law are set on course to bring about the desired achievement.**