

July 25, 2018

Councilmember David Grosso
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 402
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Councilmember Grosso,

Thank you for your letter dated July 11, 2018, which contained follow-up questions regarding the Graduation Accountability Roundtable held on June 13, 2018 and pre-hearing questions for the upcoming joint roundtable on PR22-935, the “Truancy, Reporting, and Graduation Status of Students Approval Resolution of 2018”. My responses to your questions are as follows:

- During the roundtable, you stated that 59% of DC Public Schools Class of 2018 graduation cohort graduated last month. The reduction from the 73% graduation rate from last school year could be attributed to attendance and student performance, and transfer/withdrawals remaining in cohort. Can you provide a numerical breakdown of this representation?**

As of June 2018, the estimated DCPS graduation rate was 59 percent, or 2,096 graduates out of a cohort of 3,550 students. The following table provides a numeric breakdown of how many students did not graduate for academic reasons, attendance, and transfer/withdrawals remaining in cohort.

A four-year adjusted graduation cohort is based on the students that enroll in a DC school for grade nine and is adjusted by adding any students who enter the school at any point during the next three years and subtracting any students who exit the school during that same period and produce valid documentation of a transfer. Students who exit but do not produce valid documentation of transfer to another school remain in the original school’s cohort.

Class of 2018 – Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) Estimates as of June 2018

	Number of Students	Percent of Total Cohort
<i>Total Cohort</i>	3,550	
Graduated	2,096	59%
Non-Graduates	1,454	41%
Did not graduate because failed at least 1 course needed to graduate for academic performance reasons	665	19%
Did not graduate because failed due to absence in a course needed to graduate	63	2%
Missing Only Community Service Hours	<10	N/A
IEP Certificate Track*	52	1%
Transfer/Withdrawn Remaining in Cohort**	668	19%

**IEP certificate track students are counted as non-graduates per OSSE's Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate policy.*

***Cohort excludes 426 preliminary cohort removals of students transferred out of DCPS that have been submitted to OSSE. The review of cohort removals is ongoing and will be complete by fall 2018. DCPS expects more students to be removed from the cohort which could increase the graduation rate further. (Cohort removals are based on valid documentation of a transfer to another diploma-granting school).*

In August of 2017, the 2016-2017 DCPS graduate rate (ACGR) was 73 percent. There were 2,385 total graduates (2,242 June graduates and 143 summer graduates = 2,385) out of a cohort of 3,258 students.

2. **List by high school, disaggregated by race, gender, ward, English Language Learner, the total number of seniors who have:**
 - a. **Failed due to absences in a least one course;**
 - b. **Failed to graduate in June;**
 - c. **Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school;**
 - d. **Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year;**
 - e. **Enrolled into an opportunity academy.**

The following table describes the metrics used in the disaggregated data tables to follow:

Metric	Description
1. Failed due to absences in a least one course	Failed at least one course due to 30+ unexcused absences.
2. Failed to graduate in June	Did not graduate in June. This number includes students who are on a certificate track, withdrawn/transfer, and currently enrolled students.
3. Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school	Enrolled in one or more original credit course(s) in summer school. Student may have failed this course due to 30+ unexcused absences OR never taken course.
4. Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year	Student enrolled in the same school for next school year. This is preliminary, based on pre-enrollments for SY2018-19. Final numbers will be available once the school year begins.
5. Enrolled into an opportunity academy	Student enrolled in an Opportunity Academy for next school year. This is preliminary, based on pre-enrollments for SY2018-19. Final numbers will be available once the school year begins.

Please note, the metrics used for the disaggregated data differ from the response in question 1. For example, the aggregated number of “Non-Graduates” reflected in Question 1 is represented below as the total number of students that “Failed to graduate in June.” Additionally, the number of students that failed due to absences in at least one course (n=474) includes the students who did not graduate due to absences in a course needed to graduate (n=63), as described above in question 1, and other students who may have graduated after credit recovery, or had a different circumstance, like poor academic performance on top of a failure due to absence.

Class of 2018 Data: High Schools

School Name	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in a least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
Anacostia HS	172	42	100	n<10	40	n<10
Ballou HS	294	77	163	37	21	11
Ballou STAY	96	26	88	31	47	47
Benjamin Banneker HS	104	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10

School Name	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
Cardozo EC	212	18	101	n<10	n<10	n<10
Columbia Heights EC (CHEC)	264	10	55	n<10	n<10	n<10
Coolidge HS	103	n<10	58	n<10	14	n<10
Dunbar HS	190	23	54	n<10	n<10	n<10
Eastern HS	209	39	55	n<10	11	n<10
Ellington School of the Arts	129	n<10	12	n<10	n<10	n<10
Luke Moore Alternative HS	163	63	138	n<10	64	65
McKinley Technology HS	145	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Non-Public	103	n<10	89	n<10	62	n<10
Phelps ACE HS	69	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Roosevelt High School	208	26	107	10	12	n<10
Roosevelt STAY @ MacFarland	149	74	127	33	51	52
School Without Walls HS	170	n<10	16	n<10	n<10	n<10
Washington Metropolitan HS	81	31	59	n<10	23	24
Wilson HS	511	31	145	n<10	21	n<10
Woodson, H.D. HS	178	n<10	71	n<10	n<10	n<10
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

Class of 2018 Data: Race & Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
American Indian/Alaska Native	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Asian	77	n<10	19	n<10	n<10	n<10
Black	2452	370	1027	135	303	170
Hispanic/Latino	703	90	327	25	60	44
Multi-Racial	57	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
White	254	n<10	71	n<10	17	n<10
Missing	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

Class of 2018 Data: Gender

Gender	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
Female	1730	194	577	75	162	111
Male	1820	280	877	91	223	104
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

Class of 2018 Data: Ward

School Ward	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
Ward 1	661	59	216	14	30	25
Ward 2	299	n<10	28	n<10	n<10	n<10
Ward 3	511	31	145	n<10	21	n<10
Ward 4	460	106	292	47	77	57
Ward 5	567	86	207	n<10	71	67
Ward 6	209	39	55	n<10	11	n<10
Ward 7	178	n<10	71	n<10	n<10	n<10
Ward 8	562	145	351	75	108	59
Non-Public	103	n<10	89	n<10	62	n<10
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

Class of 2018 Data: English Language Learners

English Language Learner	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
No	3281	419	1361	140	342	193
Yes	269	55	93	26	43	22
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

Class of 2018 Data: Special Education Students

Special Education	Total Cohort	Failed due to absences in at least one course ¹	Failed to graduate in June ²	Enrolled into one original course credit in summer school ³	Enrolled in their current school for a fifth year ⁴	Enrolled into an opportunity academy ⁵
No	2956	356	1060	120	228	169
Yes	594	118	394	46	157	46
Grand Total	3550	474	1454	166	385	215

3. **Share the number and percentage of students in grades ninth through eleventh that were not promoted to the next grade based on term 4 marks. What is being done to provide these students with interventions?**

Final promotion rates will be available after summer school. DCPS estimated the promotion rates of the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 based on final marks at the end of the regular 2017-18 school year (excluding summer school marks). For the purposes of this response, promotion is defined as:

- Class of 2019 (Juniors): On-track to earn 18 credits and English I, II, III, and Algebra I.
- Class of 2020 (Sophomores): On-track to earn 12 credits and English I, II, and Algebra I.
- Class of 2021 (Freshmen): On-track to earn 6 credits and English I.

Guidance counselors support students with scheduling and individualized planning, including meeting with all high school students and their families. DCPS will also begin to use our online learning platform, Naviance, to combine graduation and post-secondary planning. This platform will allow students, parents, and staff to monitor progress toward graduation and implement targeted supports.

	Promotion Status as of Regular SY2017-18 Final Marks (June 2018)				
	Total Currently Enrolled	On Track to Promote	% On Track to Promote	Not On Track to Promote	% Not On Track to Promote
Class of 2019 (Juniors)	2,811	2000	71%	811	29%
Class of 2020 (Sophomores)	2,808	2036	73%	772	27%
Class of 2021 (Freshmen)	2,570	1939	75%	631	25%

4. **Indicate by school the number of families that have appealed a reduced or failing grade due to unexcused absences in the school year 2017-2018?**
 a. **How many families won their appeal?**

A student or parent/guardian may appeal a grade reduction or failure due to unexcused absences for the following reasons:

1. The student or parent/guardian believes that a computational or procedural error was made in counting the number of unexcused absences that resulted in assignment of the reduced or failing grade (mark); or,
2. The student or parent/guardian disputes the school’s designation of any day(s) absent as unexcused instead of excused.

Eighty-nine appeals were initiated at the school level, which is the first level of an appeal. Of these, 66 were approved, 22 were denied, and one is pending a decision from the hearing officer.

The following schools received appeals: Anacostia HS, Ballou HS, Ballou Stay, Cardozo EC, Eastern HS, Luke C. Moore HS, McKinley Tech HS, Non-Public Schools, Roosevelt HS, Roosevelt Stay, and Wilson HS. Per the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), school-level appeal information is not available for privacy reasons.

5. **How many students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade in school year 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 were promoted to the next grade?**

Please note, 2017-2018 promotion and retention figures are preliminary as final figures are based on summer school outcomes and re-enrollment. DCPS does not calculate re-enrollment until the start of the school year. The final promotion and retention figures will be available in fall.

Total Registered at End of Year*	2016-2017			2017-2018		
	Promoted	Retained	Did not reenroll	Total Registered at End of Year*	Promoted	Retained
36,586	34,507	362	1,717	36,468	35,985	483

*Excludes students with disabilities who qualify for special education and are attending non-public programs, because they do not designate retention in the DCPS student information system.

6. **State the number of times principals applied for exceptions to promote a student, the name of the school, and the number of times it was granted.**

As per D.C. Official Code § 38–781.02(b)(1), decisions regarding the promotion and retention of a DCPS student enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 8th grade must be made by the student’s principal, based upon the recommendation of the student’s teacher and in consideration of the promotion requirements set forth in the DCMR. In order to ensure appropriate oversight of this process, school leaders were asked to review proposed exceptions with their Instructional Superintendents before finalizing the determination. After a review of relevant data, school leaders submitted written justifications for promotion to Central Office via the ASPEN Student Information system.

DCPS granted 241 written justifications for promotion at the following schools: Aiton ES, Cardozo EC, H.D. Cooke ES, Hearst ES, Langdon ES, LaSalle-Backus EC, McKinley MS, Moten ES, Peabody ES, Smother ES, Washington Met HS, West EC, and Wheatley EC. Per the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), school-level data is not available due to privacy concerns.

7. **The Alvarez & Marsal report found that most DCPS high schools exhibit a culture of passing and graduating students. How is DCPS tackling this issue?**

DCPS’ vision of ensuring that students feel prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life requires us to strictly prohibit the practice of passing students who have not adequately mastered course material, as it does not set our students up for success. DCPS has taken several next steps to address concerns addressed in the Alvarez and Marsal report. These include:

- **Written Guidance, Professional Development, and Individualized Technical Assistance:** DCPS has worked hard to ensure clarity regarding legal requirements and to support full compliance with these requirements through a combination of written materials, in-person and webinar training, and side-by-side coaching for all schools. DCPS is also launching a new oversight framework for the 2018-2019 school year.
- **FA Policy Automation:** Rather than requiring teachers to monitor students’ attendance data and manually apply the failure due to attendance policy, DCPS has now automated the policy in ASPEN. Final course grade automatically becomes an F when they’ve received 30 or more unexcused absences in the course.

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- **IMPACT Updates:** Given concerns that have been raised about the potential consequences of including pass rates, promotion rates, and graduation rates in IMPACT evaluation rubrics, DCPS removed all references to these metrics from the rubrics.

8. The Alvarez & Marsal report also found that DCPS requires an “increasingly burdensome documentation” to fail students. Has DCPS changed anything about this?

As educators, it is our job to make sure our students have many opportunities to access course content. However, we must also ensure that our systems are designed to minimize administrative burden. As noted above, DCPS has automated key actions in the system that were previously manual and additional updates will be in place for 2018-2019, which will further reduce the challenges for teachers to track student progress. An example of this is the ability to upload sample work and progress notes directly into student files in ASPEN, rather than maintain hard copy files and tracking systems.

On June 22, DC Public Schools (“DCPS”) released draft emergency regulations and policies regarding attendance, student promotion, secondary grading, and graduation for public comment. If approved, the proposed changes would go into effect in School Year 2018-2019. As a result, the Committee of the Whole and the Committee on Education are holding a joint oversight roundtable on these emergency regulations on Thursday, July 26. I have a number of pre-hearing questions:

Truancy

9. How many DCPS elementary and secondary students received at least one unexcused absence in homeroom this past school year?

As of June 19, 2018, 26,879 elementary students (Grades Pre-K through 5th) received at least one unexcused absence in their homeroom. Secondary students do not have a homeroom course, but 18,986 secondary students (Grades 6th through 12th) received at least one unexcused absence in one of their courses.

10. What are the appropriate absenteeism protocol interventions initiated by classroom or homeroom teachers?

DCPS believes that the first step in ensuring every day counts is for all staff to work to create a welcoming environment for our students. Teachers play a critical role in that process. They also receive supports and training to implement appropriate attendance interventions. These may include:

- Entering accurate attendance into the ASPEN system on a daily/period basis as required by law;
- Placing a phone call to a student’s home whenever students are unexpectedly absent from class and document the call in ASPEN;
- Providing attendance incentives for chronically absent students in their classes;
- Welcoming students back to class after absences and making a special inquiry about how they are doing;
- Working with students after absences to provide make-up work;
- Empowering students to take ownership of missed work;
- Providing other school-based staff (such as school nurse, attendance counselor or social worker) with information about student absences and documenting this information in ASPEN;

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- Verifying the best contact information for families and communicating with the main office if there is a change in a student’s contact information, as teachers are often the first to hear about new contact information for a family;
 - Ensuring that parents are consistently made aware of attendance concerns in report card comments and parent/teacher conferences; and
 - Conducting home visits, as appropriate.

Appeals Panel

11. How long would a member of the appeals panel serve?

Panels are assembled on a case-by-case basis for each student and are intended to provide an independent review of circumstances around the grade reductions.

12. Who is considered a “duly authorized” representative?

A duly authorized representative is an attorney or advocate that is representing the student’s interests. These can include advocates appointed by the court and private attorneys retained by the family.

Reporting

13. Can you explain in detail how punitive consequences for highly mobile students will be replaced with opportunities to make up work and show mastery when transferring into a new school?

Under previous regulations, students who transferred into a course after the first term, but did not have that course in-progress elsewhere prior to the transfer, would only be able to audit the course and not earn a credit. Under the new emergency and proposed regulations, students will be given the opportunity to receive materials and instruction from the components of the course they missed and will have an opportunity to demonstrate proficiency and earn credit by receiving proficient scores on prior material.

14. What does it mean for a teacher to have primary responsibility for evaluating the work of the student?

Teachers are responsible for grading, evaluating, and providing feedback on student work. This should take several forms, including informal feedback, progress reports, assignment grades and comments, and course grades. DCPS works to ensure that parents and students remain informed in writing on a regular basis of the progress students make toward achieving the content standards.

15. Please explain the policy around make-up work.

Under the proposed policy, schools have the flexibility to develop their own make-up work policies, based on the feedback of their teachers and staff, but they must ensure the policies align with the following criteria:

- Each school shall specify a reasonable period of time for completion of make-up work, which shall be *no less than one full calendar day for each day missed*.
- Teachers must provide written communication to students at the beginning of the course regarding their make-up work policy.

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- Teachers should follow standard grading procedures when grading make-up work.
 - Students should be given the same access to make-up work, whether their absences were excused or unexcused.

These policies will be available to students and families at their schools.

16. What is considered a “late entry”?

In DCPS’ engagement sessions, we heard consistently that our current policies were not meeting the needs of highly mobile students. Students who enter a school late have additional obstacles to earning credit and graduating.

Student entry into a course is considered late entry after 50 percent of the instructional time has passed. This typically corresponds to one term and aligns with term grades. Teachers should document that a student is able to demonstrate mastery in the prior content (through exams, written materials, and other comparable tasks).

17. What standards does DCPS have to clearly identify a student as “at risk of failing” to meet the content standards?

Teachers are responsible for informally and formally monitoring students’ progress toward content mastery. Based on informal review, assignment grades and notes, progress reports, and course grades, teachers should identify students who may be at risk of failing and notify the parent or guardian, in writing.

Teachers should undergo this process each advisory period and provide notification to parents at the midpoint (approximately four to five weeks into each advisory period). If appropriate, teachers should refer the student to the school’s student support team, which can work to implement appropriate interventions. These may include:

- Examining and altering current instructional strategies or materials;
- Tutoring (during or after school);
- A change in schedule;
- Referral to other support, social service, or health-related services;
- Problem-solving with other students or individuals who may have an impact on the student’s achievement;
- A change in teacher; and
- Targeted instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my team with any further questions.

Sincerely,



Amanda Alexander
Interim Chancellor