

August 18, 2021

John-Paul C. Hayworth, Executive Director
District of Columbia State Board of Education
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street, NW, 530S
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Hayworth and Members of the Board:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments about the impact of the 2007 District of Columbia, or DC, school reforms on student achievement. My name is Duncan Chaplin, and I am a senior researcher at Mathematica. Last week, my colleagues and I issued a new report that suggests the suite of DC reforms passed in 2007 greatly helped math and reading assessment scores, especially for Black students. These reforms led to mayoral control over the DC Public Schools, centralized authority over charter public schools, and a united enrollment system.

Our study provides the most comprehensive evidence to date of a causal connection between the reforms and students' improved achievement. We analyzed student achievement data in grades 4 and 8 from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or the NAEP, a test that has been administered nationally every few years since the early 1990s. We used advanced statistical methods to account for pre-reform differences between DC and other areas and general trends afterward.

Several notable findings emerged from our study:

- DC's reforms appear to have contributed to large improvements in grade 4 math and reading scores.
- These gains in grade 4 were much larger than gentrification would explain, suggesting they represent real increases in student learning.
- Similar gains in math persisted through grade 8.
- Impacts of the reforms on NAEP achievement in math were strongest for Black students.
- Grade 8 reading gains were less strong, suggesting the grade 4 improvements corresponded to skills students could have eventually gained before grade 8 in the absence of reforms.
- The impacts of DC's reforms were similar in magnitude to those observed in New Orleans, which also implemented major school reforms over a decade ago, immediately after Hurricane Katrina. The scale of impacts in DC was larger than for some well-known education interventions, such as the class size reductions in Tennessee and the Success for All program.

The student achievement gains we found are very encouraging because they indicate DC's school reforms not only had a positive impact on student achievement, but unlike many other reforms, these improvements were long lasting. We hope this research provides the Board and other school district leaders serving in DC and other areas a better understanding of how much the reforms around accountability and public school options can connect to improve student learning.

To: John-Paul C. Hayworth
From: Duncan Chaplin
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We have enclosed a copy of the [study report](#) and [issue brief](#), with our written testimony, if you would like to review more details about the study. You are also welcome to contact me or Dallas Dotter, a co-author of the study, who has joined me today, if you have follow-up questions.

As researchers at Mathematica, an organization committed to providing evidence that can inform policymaking decisions, it is our honor to provide you evidence that can illuminate how DC school reforms impacted student achievement over time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duncan Chaplin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

Duncan Chaplin
Senior Researcher, Mathematica