

**Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka
On the Path to Great Results for the District's Public Schools?**

March 14, 2007

This hearing will come to order.

Good morning and welcome.

I would like to thank you for joining us here today for the second in a series of hearings on the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system reforms. I appreciate your time before the Subcommittee. I know you all have been working hard and I want to commend you for the improvements thus far. I look forward to hearing more about the progress you've made and your further intentions.

As you may know, before being elected to Congress, I was a teacher and a principal in my home State of Hawaii. I know first hand the challenges facing any educational system, the care it takes to bring about reforms, the needed investment in clear strategic plans, and the critical importance of providing quality education to underserved populations.

At our last hearing in July, we discussed accountability in the new system as a cornerstone of the reform proposals. At that time, it was too early in the process for you to provide any plans. There was a lot of data showing a failing system after years of neglect. Mr. Reinoso, Ms. Rhee, Ms. Gist, and Mr. Lew all discussed the hope of reforms, and the efforts to bring about meaningful, accountable improvements in the education of DC's children.

The leadership team is working hard to meet the high expectations the community has of the Mayor's proposal. You have made many tough decisions and taken noteworthy steps. I understand that a number of accountability measures have been put into place including weekly meetings at all levels of DC government, which hold senior level staff and officials accountable for their efforts. I look forward to hearing more about these efforts.

The State Superintendent's Office is working with the U.S. Department of Education to address compliance with No Child Left Behind Act. It is establishing a new personnel management system, and is helping teachers meet certification requirements.

The Facilities Maintenance and Improvement Office has been working down the list of outstanding work orders, establishing a new, user friendly system for triaging, and tracking of work orders.

And, DCPS has created electronic personnel files for all employees, evaluated the performance of all DCPS central office staff, terminated underperforming employees,

proposed closing more than 20 schools, and plans to implement a pay-for-performance system.

I have many concerns with pay-for-performance systems in the Federal government and their ability to be an effective tool in improving the performance of employees. While pay and benefits are a critical component to employment, the evidence is still out on whether pay-for-performance systems motivate employees more than other factors such as a good manager or feeling a sense of importance about one's work, especially for those working in public service.

I am interested to hear how Ms. Rhee plans to provide adequate training for managers and employees being brought under this new system, and more broadly on the issue of human capital recruitment, retention, and professional development in the public school system. I know that this is your area of expertise, and as the Subcommittee with jurisdiction over the Federal workforce, we have some expertise in this area too.

Congress and the DC City Council have given the authority to the Mayor and his leadership team to take on these challenges and bring about changes. To help in the process, the President's fiscal year 2009 budget proposal includes an additional \$32 million to support the education reforms, which I am pleased to see.

It is also our responsibility to provide oversight of the reforms.

After the Subcommittee's hearing in July, Senator Voinovich and I asked the Government Accountability Office to provide an independent assessment of the reform efforts and conduct a short-term and a long-term evaluation. The long-term study will be a more in-depth look at the education reforms, and I intend to hold another hearing once that work is complete.

The short-term study, which we will hear the results of today, captured the early part of the reforms and the initial steps taken to address some of the most fundamental challenges such as management restructuring, reviewing teacher and employee standards, development of strategic plans, and addressing crumbling facilities.

The results of the short term evaluation demonstrate that there has been significant progress and positive management reforms throughout the system. For example, the Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts in Georgetown. It is a remarkable school with high quality, unique programs and tremendously talented students and educators. However, the facilities are dilapidated, run down, and in need of considerable renovations. We need to invest in the institutions that are working and reform those that don't.

I want to commend all of you for the progress made. To guide these reforms and build upon these efforts, one of GAO's recommendations is that a system-wide strategic plan should be developed. I agree with this finding.

For all major transformational reform efforts, it is so important that there be a strategy for the future as well as an attention to the present challenges. The strategic plan should be a transparent, living document for the education system focused on the students with a clear vision for the efforts.

We are looking at a fast moving train. Everyday new changes occur in the school system that tests the hope and expectations of parents, teachers, the community, and most importantly the children. It is your job to help manage those expectations. I am hoping that today we can catch a glimpse of these reforms to date, see the progress that's been made, and have a greater understanding of the plans for the future of the reforms.