

**MAYOR AND SUPERINTENDENT PARTNERSHIPS
IN EDUCATION:
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR**

**THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE REP. BUCK MCKEON, RANKING MEMBER**



**TESTIMONY OF ADRIAN M. FENTY
MAYOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2008

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and distinguished committee members: I am honored to appear before you in the company of my esteemed fellow mayor and friend Mike Bloomberg and with representatives from the great cities of Atlanta and Chicago. On behalf of the residents of the District of Columbia, I would like to briefly talk to you about the daunting scholastic hurdles District students face, and what their government and community have done and continue to do to provide them the educational opportunities they need and deserve.

Accountability

I assumed the mayoralty of the District of Columbia in January 2007 with a determination to completely transform a school system that spent more per pupil than any other system in the country, yet languished at or near the bottom of every national measure of academic achievement. Simply put, the District of Columbia was failing its children.

Many doctoral dissertations analyzing the merits of competing educational theories could be written to explain this failure, but, at its heart, the explanation was frustratingly simple: Zero accountability. Because the multi-layer bureaucracy created plenty of places for the buck to stop, we were caught in a never-ending cycle of finger pointing and blame.

In municipal government, if the city fails to pick up garbage, the mayor knows exactly which member of his or her cabinet is answerable, and what steps need to be taken to address the problem; yet, when it came to perhaps the most vital charge of municipal affairs – the future of our children – no one could be held to account. As counterintuitive as it sounds, the mayor had absolutely no say whatsoever in the administration of the school system of the city.

I was determined to ensure an immediate and decisive end to the cycle of blame. My approach was, in objective terms, confoundingly simple: just as much as the mayor is accountable for keeping the streets clear of snow, he or she should – and must – be responsible for ensuring that the city’s children are afforded the very best life skills and educational resources that the nation’s capital ought to provide them. And, if the mayor failed in this charge, he or she must accept the blame and consequences.

I then selected a proven educational maverick and innovator, Michelle Rhee, as the first-ever Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools, and we got to work performing such radical, yet obvious tasks as ensuring timely delivery of textbooks to appropriate classrooms, clearing out warehouses where text books and teaching supplies lay unused while our teachers were spending their own money to buy these same supplies, and establishing – for the first time – an integrated record-keeping system that tracked school records. Records, all 4 million pieces of paper, that had previously been strewn on the floor in a storage room at our central administration offices.



Results of Reform

There truly is a sense in the streets, homes and classrooms of this city that we are all in this together. Parents, teachers and, most of all, students, truly understand that the bar has been raised. But if more has been invested, it is because more is being expected. Our students seem to understand this and they have delivered.

I'm extremely proud to be able to say that in the 13 months since taking over the schools, we've already made dramatic, meaningful, lasting changes. We've seen impressive gains in reading and math scores for our elementary and secondary students. We've brought innovative reforms to staffing and personnel, including a framework for outstanding teachers to trade tenure for bonuses -- based on student achievement -- that will make them some of the highest-paid teachers in the United States.

Next Steps

This fall, we'll take our first steps toward a comprehensive school staffing model that puts art, music and physical education teachers, nurses and counselors, and other key staff in every school building. We've made the tough decision to close or consolidate under-enrolled schools to do this. We've developed an individualized reform plan for each of the schools that is in restructuring status under the No Child Left Behind Act. We're also making tremendous progress on facilities improvements. Students must get the message that they can be successful in school and that we're committed to their success by providing appropriate environments for learning.

Mr. Chairman, you may know that I spend a few weekends a year taking part in marathons and triathlons. We've done a great deal in our first year in charge of the schools, but I look at this work as just the warm-up. We have much, much further to go.

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and other members of the Committee, I want to thank you for your support and for your interest in urban education. I look forward to working together to ensure a prosperous future for generations of District of Columbia students.

This concludes my prepared remarks, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

