

**Testimony of Ariana Quiñones-Miranda**  
**FY 2009 Operating Budget for the District of Columbia Public Schools**  
**Thursday, November 15, 2007**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. My name is Ariana Quiñones-Miranda and I am here as a co-chair of the Joint Advisory Council on the Education of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students, also known as the JAC.

I want to share with you concerns and suggestions relating to the adequacy of funding for the DCPS Office of Bilingual Education (OBE) and Office for Civil Rights and Multicultural Affairs (OCRMA).

**Three Points**

1. First, I will share questions pertaining to the continuation of functions and offices serving the linguistically and culturally diverse (LCD) population which the JAC members would be happy to discuss at another venue;
2. Second, I will express concerns about funding OBE and OCRMA at adequate levels; and
3. Third, I will share some brief recommendations regarding OBE and OCRMA.

**Questions**

- The Office of Bilingual Education is not identified on the organizational chart currently posted on the DCPS website. Where will OBE fall in the organizational structure?
- The Office for Civil Rights and Multicultural Affairs (OCRMA) is also not identified on the org chart. Where will OCRMA functions fall?
- With the Director of OCRMA moving to the Office of the State Superintendent for Education, what are the plans for maintaining the functions of OCRMA, including the Language Access Coordinator position and oversight of the federal compliance agreements?

**Concerns and Suggestions**

**Maintenance of OBE funding for services to LCD population.** The JAC would like to highlight the importance of the functions carried out by OBE. While two staff have moved from DCPS to the State, their local functions still need to be carried out. This office has traditionally been under-funded resulting in real service gaps (for example, running out of funds partway through the year to provide translation and interpretation). Further cuts, beyond accounting for the two positions that have moved, would seriously limit OBE's ability to carry out local and federal mandates.

**Funding for the Office for Civil Rights and Multicultural Affairs.** OCRMA was created and still exists because DCPS is out of compliance with federal mandates. The functions of this office are core to the delivery of services to the District of Columbia's ELL students. These functions are not of the types that are easily funded by outside grants. Indeed, the federal government does not allow the use of title funds for

monitoring activities (a key function of OCRMA). It is the DCPS operating budget that must support the bulk of OCRMA expenses.

The office is responsible for activities such as:

- Coordination of citywide Language Access Act compliance activities by DCPS
- Training and consultation on federally-mandated services to ELL students
- Oversight of ELL Plan implementation by DCPS
- Coordination of compliance monitoring of all local schools
- Conducting multicultural training as described in the Agreements and ELL Plan
- Production of publications such as a compliance training manual for all school leaders
- Development of partnerships with outside organizations and parents to further objectives of the ELL Plan and ensure academic success for ELL students
- Facilitation of JAC activities

For several years, DCPS has not been able to implement certain obligations under the plan because of inadequate funding. Maintaining the ability to carry out these functions, and the corresponding funding in the FY09 budget is critical.

**Establishment of new bilingual immersion programs.** While there is ever-increasing demand for more dual immersion bilingual programs, we are concerned about the sustainability of bilingual programs that are developed organically, on some occasions without the knowledge of the Office for Bilingual Education. At times, these programs are started out of an interest by the local school principal, but without systemic supports, they are likely to cease to continue if that principal leaves the school. We suggest that a formal process for the development of new bilingual (and ESL) programs be overseen by OBE so that local schools can have the appropriate supports and accountability for results that we want for all academic programs.

Correspondingly, we would like to work with the administration to ensure that the real cost for implementing dual immersion programs (i.e., two teachers per classroom, assessments in the target language, language lab equipment, additional professional development) is clearly articulated, transparent, and factored into the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula so that local schools implementing these programs have the appropriate resources to do so.

**Centralized intake center for newcomers.** The Office for Bilingual Education operates an “intake and assessment center” for students new to the country and new to DCPS. Currently, a student would enroll at his/her local school and once identified as an English language learner, the family is then referred to OBE for intake and assessment purposes. This has not been an entirely effective process, because the families do not always make it to OBE in a timely manner, and in some cases, not at all. This allows for students to slip through the cracks and go untested for far too long. DCPS should consider establishing a centralized intake and assessment center as the first stop for students and families new to the District. The intake center would be responsible for assisting families with all enrollment paperwork, immunization verification, transcript verification, language testing, and ensuring the student is assigned to the right local school. This

“one-stop” approach has been an effective model in other jurisdictions including Montgomery County and Arlington County Public Schools and should be studied for its applicability to DCPS.

**Parent Engagement.** Under the Master Education Plan, training and support for LCD parents was identified as a priority. The JAC supports continuation of programs such as Parents As Partners that have provided meaningful training to parents in past years. Now with changes such as 9<sup>th</sup> grade moving to the high school level and with NCLB school choice mandates, it is increasingly important that parents are informed and empowered to engage in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

In closing, I want to say that the JAC members are committed to moving DCPS to compliance and beyond in the provision of services to LCD and ELL students. The members will work to ensure we have a transparent process in place, with appropriate accountability measures, and that we work in partnership with DCPS and other stakeholders to achieve our goal of educational attainment for English Language Learner students.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

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