

I am Valerie Jablow, a DCPS parent. I do not have many personal interactions with Hanseul Kang to relate to you. But I do have personal experience with the outcomes of Ms. Kang's work at OSSE.

Here are some recent examples:

--Ms. Kang has ensured that our public schools are rated with test-heavy scores correlated with student socioeconomics.¹ In addition to the fact that the STAR rating neither informs nor improves schools,² such test-heavy scoring means that schools with largely poor student bodies are more likely to be closed or turned over to other operators, leading to harmful disruption.³ Also, because the STAR rating Kang created is relative, there will always be one-star schools.⁴ In this way, Kang has used DC government resources to ensure a steady supply of our public school facilities, students, and the tax dollars those students represent, to privatizers, without regard for true educational improvement.⁵ Worse, OSSE under Kang's leadership has ignored the effect of the STAR rating on enrollment, while not providing adequate resources to low-rated schools.⁶

--OSSE appeared unaware that DCPS was not providing required science and social studies classes at four middle schools, three of which have the lowest STAR rating.⁷ Whether the instructional shortfall was caused by an increased focus on math and ELA--or was the *cause* of low test scores--remains unclear, but shows how far we are from the mayor's promise of an Alice Deal for all.

--OSSE does not vet interim education providers for charter schools, which educate nearly half our students. Taxpayers learned this only when a charter student, suspended an outrageous amount of times, was apparently not being educated appropriately by the private provider.⁸

--In the wake of a graduation accountability scandal that OSSE itself apparently never discovered, OSSE refused to have an independent investigation of charter schools⁹--despite testimony from the charter board executive director that the charter board was not following the law regarding suspensions.¹⁰ Rather, OSSE self-investigated charters, thus setting up a closed feedback loop.¹¹

--Legislation to set up a politically independent education research collaborative was opposed by Kang. Given that parents and citizens crave information about our public schools unmediated by political interests, this suggests that under Kang's leadership, OSSE does not value politically independent assessment or openness in government.¹²

--During an investigation of residency fraud at Ellington high school, OSSE apparently erroneously accused dozens of families of fraud, leading some to sue.¹³

--When asked about OSSE combining test scores of math PARCC tests of differing degrees of difficulty at the same grade, Kang ignored how this practice disadvantages schools that administer the harder tests—including mine.¹⁴

Taken together, these items show how under Kang's leadership, OSSE missed truly important information about our schools as well as opportunities to help students and schools.

And, except for the last, all of these happened just in 2018 alone.¹⁵

At the same time, OSSE appeared to prioritize the privatizing of our public schools and opposed efforts to make the agency politically independent.

Please ask how any of that serves DC or our students. Thank you.

¹ See the excellent work of researcher Betsy Wolf here:

<https://twitter.com/betsyjwolf/status/1071440317218504704>

The STAR rating is available here: <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard>

² As a single metric created out of whole cloth, the stars provide no real information by themselves nor point to any improvements that can be undertaken by staff. Moreover, by making the STAR rating prominent in the lottery website, OSSE has ensured that this five-point rating is a large part of school choice.

³ We know that mobility is not good for students—and most harmful to at risk students. See the data here, from the work of the cross sector task force:

<https://educationdc.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/data-review-slides.pdf>

Despite these data and the fact that test scores are correlated with socioeconomics of students, in 2017 OSSE created DC's test-heavy ESSA plan, which provides that schools with low test scores will be either closed or privatized after a few years of low test scores.

See p. 35 of the plan here:

https://sboe.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/sboe/page_content/attachments/OSSE%20ESSA%20State%20Plan_%20March%202017%202017%20Final.pdf

The upshot of these policies is that OSSE has been at the forefront of promulgating student churn through closures and school conversions—which in DC are legendary. See here for a good compilation of recent closures:

<https://twitter.com/betsyjwolf/status/1068622214357020672>

⁴ See this handy write-up of the pitfalls of the STAR rating, created by the LSAT of the Capitol Hill Cluster School:

<https://educationdc.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/understanding-the-star-rating-in-depth-.pdf>

This outlines the problems only for schools up to grade 8. For high schools, the STAR rating is more pernicious, in that it has no growth measure. So high schools that have students coming in many grade levels below where they should be begin at a disadvantage that can rarely be entirely erased. See here:

<https://educationdc.net/2019/02/16/seeing-stars/>

⁵ Jack Schneider gave an excellent presentation in January on the many ways in which we could measure school quality that would actually reflect quality instruction and education—and how the way in which we currently measure school quality serves a purpose that doesn't include helping students learn. See here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jvAVsURVvI&feature=youtu.be

⁶ OSSE plans to provide \$10 million over a 3-year period to 10 comprehensive support schools (the lowest 5%). This amount is far from what is needed to address the problems at these schools. Compare what are effectively budget cuts for three DCPS high schools in this budget cycle—Woodson, Anacostia, and Ballou. Each is taking at least a \$1 million hit. See here:

<https://twitter.com/DCWard7teacher/status/1100383965851070464>

Thus, the best that OSSE's plan here would do is provide a revenue neutral budget going forward for schools with deep needs--not substantive resources for improvement.

Nor is OSSE providing financial support to the one- and two-star schools that are above the lowest 5%. Taken together, these factors will inevitably set in motion a continuing downward spiral of low-scoring schools in enrollment, test scores, and human spirit. This is a plan—not a bug—of OSSE's work under Kang's leadership.

⁷ See here: <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/DC-Public-Schools-Allow-Middle-Schools-to-Fall-Short-of-Required-Science-Social-Studies-Instruction-502387661.html>

The shorted middle schools are Cardozo Education Campus, Kelly Miller, Brookland Middle, and Eliot-Hine. Only Kelly Miller has two stars; the rest have one. The news story above notes that staff alleged that focusing on math and ELA—which are tested in PARCC--was one of the reasons for the shortfall in instruction of social studies and science. Those are not tested subjects in PARCC.

⁸ See the excellent reporting here: <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21038004/special-ed-advocates-call-for-investigation-into-unlicensed-company-serving-charter-students>

⁹ The initial reporting of the scandal, in late 2017, was here: <https://wamu.org/story/17/11/28/really-happened-ballou-d-c-high-school-every-senior-got-college/>

OSSE refused to have an independent investigation of charter school graduation rates, despite voices in the council and state board calling for just that—and despite the fact that OSSE could not access graduation requirements for all charter high schools, and most charter high schools at the time had no attendance requirement for graduation.

The ramifications of this purposeful turning away by an agency charged by law with ensuring equity in school accountability and quality are wide-ranging. See here:

<https://educationdc.net/2018/01/20/come-on-city-leaders-do-the-right-thing-fully-investigate-all-our-dc-high-schools/>

and here:

https://www.scribd.com/document/369410432/State-Board-of-Education-Graduation-Audit#from_embed

That lack of independent scrutiny also has disturbing ramifications for DC council members with education oversight. For instance, at the charter board performance oversight hearing on Feb. 15, 2019, council member Phil Mendelson asked public witness Marty Welles (at about the 1 hour mark in the video) “Aren’t charters doing better than DCPS?”

That question betrays a belief system unsupported by facts. For instance, using data from OSSE audited enrollment reports and the OSSE SY 16-17 final graduation report, you get the following numbers:

Fall 2012 9th grade enrollment: 6252 total (2280 in charters; 3972 in DCPS)
(this enrollment includes both the entering 9th grade class as well as students held-back from previous years)

Fall 2016 12th grade enrollment: 3370 total (1147 in charters; 2223 in DCPS)
(this enrollment represents the retention of students and any net transfers through the high school years)

That works out to the following:

Adjusted cohort in spring 2017 as a percentage of 9th grade enrollment:

71% = DC's public schools

63% = Charters

76% = DCPS

Graduation rate in 2017 as a percentage of 9th grade enrollment:

54% = DC's public schools

46% = Charters

58% = DCPS

Who's better now? See here for more information:

<https://educationdc.net/2018/07/06/dc-graduation-rates-propaganda/>

¹⁰ See here: <https://educationdc.net/2018/04/20/this-is-not-a-law-that-we-are-enforcing/>

¹¹ This resembles the relationship of the charter board with its apparent promotion of private group TenSquare as a turnaround organization for charters at risk of closure. See here: <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/21006459/behind-the-consulting-firm-raking-in-millions-from-dc-charter-schools>

That firm has been advising the charter board on how to ensure the charter board's rating system, the PMF, isn't as biased against schools with larger percentages of students who are poor. Now, as a result of FOIA requests, we can see documents about both the PMF at risk bias (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1P1mYDKbcdASIDU8qRXGkiF4OE6vTMhh5>) as well as documents showing TenSquare's close collaboration with the charter board on it (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/178D1j9DKSpl7UL-tEi9DoYVrF2KBsHIN/view?ts=5c735e98>).

¹² Kang testified against the legislation during a council hearing in 2018. But that was hardly the first time that political influence had a hand in DC school governance and independence. The state board of education was apparently influenced by DC council members to **not** demand an independent investigation of charter school graduation rates. See here: <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/are-dc-leaders-playing-politics-with-students-futures/65-509048854>

At about the same time, legislation to make OSSE more politically independent of mayoral control was tabled—while a political organization with deep ties to education reform and privatization phonebanked to ensure a heavier test weight on DC’s ESSA plan (see here: <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/loose-lips/article/20853674/an-education-pac-is-phonebanking-dc-residents-to-promote-controversial-policy>).

¹³ See here for the ongoing saga: <https://educationdc.net/2018/11/28/why-dc-needs-independent-education-data-ellington-edition/>

Recall that an OSSE lawyer allegedly wanted to slow down the investigation because of the election. See these reports:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/secret-probe-points-to-widespread-enrollment-fraud-at-acclaimed-dc-high-school/2018/02/27/e20d2684-1b33-11e8-b2d9-08e748f892c0_story.html?utm_term=.26d273c95e40

<https://wamu.org/story/18/02/27/possible-residency-fraud-d-c-s-duke-ellington-school-arts-report-finds/>

¹⁴ Kang noted that “you can draw some conclusions” from the resulting composite score and noted that the tests should follow the school’s curriculum. See here: <https://educationdc.net/2016/06/17/different-dc-public-middle-schools-use-different-parcc-math-tests/>

The problem is that some schools choose to administer only the most basic math test, even when offering more advanced math courses for the same group of students. To do otherwise risks lower PARCC scores. And because the PARCC tests themselves are not useful pedagogically, there is no advantage gained from using more advanced tests, no matter how closely they align with the advanced math curriculum the school uses.

¹⁵ There is plenty more before 2018! For instance, in 2017, I analyzed OSSE’s lax enforcement of (and tenuous grasp of reality around) the Healthy Schools Act:

<https://educationdc.net/2017/12/02/unhealthy-school-acts/>