

February 11, 2022

Dear Councilmember Pinto and Representative Chang,

DC Public Schools (DCPS) is committed to the safety and well-being of every student. DCPS has robust processes in place to prevent sexual misconduct through required background screenings for all employees, mandatory trainings for staff, and implementation of a strict reporting protocol to the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) when we become aware of incidents or allegations of sexual misconduct involving students. We support students who raise concerns and recognize the courage and strength it takes to speak out.

Please see our responses to your specific questions regarding the Duke Ellington School of the Arts (DESA) below.

**A response on the steps OSSE/DCPS will be taking to prevent future predatory behavior at Duke Ellington and other DCPS schools including updates on proper record keeping of these allegations and reports.**

DCPS has been working with the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP), the entity that operates DESA on behalf of DCPS, to provide support in this area for DCPS students and training for DESAP staff to ensure that all students feel safe in school. In 2020, DCPS directed DESA to take numerous steps to strengthen the prevention and reporting culture concerning allegations of sexual misconduct, including partnering with the DC Rape Crisis Center to conduct trainings for staff and creating a committee to elevate student voices. As part of the partnership with the DC Rape Crisis Center, the Center has also held meetings with each DESA grade level to hear directly from students on their perceptions of their safety and to educate students on ways to report if they feel unsafe. Additionally, DCPS conducted an audit in 2018 to ensure all staff were fully compliant with their background and fingerprint checks.

The DCPS Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity (CARE) team is responsible for receiving claims of discrimination and sexual harassment. In July 2021, all school leaders were required to attend a mandatory summer training session on civil rights protections and the role of the school leader in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. In February, refresher training was provided to all school leaders. The DCPS CARE team also previewed that it is in the process of developing age-appropriate student level training for all DCPS students beginning in Spring 2022. Additionally, the CARE team is developing dress code training for DESA staff that will address specific concerns raised by the school community. This training will also occur this spring.

DESAP is a valued DCPS partner, which has operated DESA for more than 20 years. In that time, they have built DESA into the outstanding and high-demand performing arts school we know it to be today. DCPS plans to assume full operation of DESA. DCPS is currently in discussions with DESAP to create a plan for a smooth transition and DESAP's continued role moving forward, with a shared goal of a strong future for DESA and the continuation of its high-

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quality program of study. As part of this process, DCPS will ensure that DESA's policies, procedures, record keeping, and training practices align with those of all other DCPS schools and promote a safe and welcoming school community.

**A formal review of the Duke Ellington School Board structure and full consideration to placement on the board of an objective party who is trained as a Title IX expert.**

DESAP hired a Title IX Coordinator for DESA who started working at the beginning of this school year. DCPS and the DESAP Board of Directors are engaged in discussions to determine the role of the board going forward. Upon transition, while the DESAP Board will provide support to DESA in a different capacity, it will no longer govern the school. DCPS will ensure that the school's policies, procedures, and practices align with requirements for all schools in the DCPS portfolio while also allowing the unique and successful arts-based academic program to continue to thrive.

**A requirement that personnel files on all Duke Ellington teachers be centrally maintained by DCPS regardless of whether the teachers are DCPS employees to improve the ability to keep our children safe from harm.**

As stated above, DCPS is currently working with DESAP on a plan to transition current DESA staff employed by DESAP to become DCPS employees. All staff files will be managed by DCPS similarly to all other DCPS personnel.

Sincerely,



Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.  
Chancellor, DC Public Schools

CC: Dr. Christina Grant, State Superintendent of Education,  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education