



The Washington Teachers' Union

Statement for the Record

**District of Columbia City Council
Committee of the Whole
Community Schools Incentive Amendment Act of 2011**

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**Submitted by:
Nathan A. Saunders**

President

Good morning Chairman Brown and members of the Council of the District of Columbia. My name is Nathan A. Saunders, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). I am here today to testify on the Community Schools Incentive Amendment Act of 2011.

The Washington Teachers' Union supports certain parts of the Community Schools Incentive Amendment Act of 2011. We believe that the additional services offered by this Act are essential to affording the supports our high-need students and communities need to grow and succeed. The District's teachers have always known that accountability based education reforms without the right supports would not amount to increasing the achievement levels of our students. Today, teachers are still voicing these concerns and continue to advocate for additional supports for our high-needs students.

In the past years, Michelle Rhee's accountability based reforms failed to expose the underlying reasons for the gaps in student achievement levels. Needless to say, these reforms have done little to change the fact that the high rate of poverty has devastated our children's academic achievements. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in the past seven years, the achievement gap for the District's impoverished children has doubled from a difference of 20 percentage points in 2003 to 40 percentage points in 2011.ⁱ

Many of the challenges of poverty have been minimized by the successful implementation of community schools around the country. In many cases, community schools are doing a fantastic job of closing the achievement gap. In Cincinnati Ohio, for instance, the Oyler Community Learning Center graduated more students in the past three years, than in the previous 85 years.

This community-school has in fact seen its graduation rates rise from 20 percent in the 1990s to 82 percent in 2010.ⁱⁱ

While DC's teachers acknowledge the achievements of community-schools around the country, they are concerned with how this particular Act will be funded. Teachers want to make it clear that these services cannot be funded through the shifting of funds away from their students during regular school hours.

The Washington Teachers' Union supports this legislation with the following amendments. First, the wording in this Act must specifically state that the monies to fund this pilot cannot come from the general education fund. Second, referencing page 2, section 2 (3) of the proposed legislation, the WTU requests to be considered a community partner and eligible provider of services.

As a union dedicated to the needs of our community, the Washington Teachers' Union has always focused its efforts on the development of expert professionals. By September of this year, the Washington Teachers' Union will relocate to the Capitol Hill neighborhood where it will feature a state of the art professional development center. This center will feature programs that focus on the furthering development of the professional, technical and educational skills of our members, all services that would benefit high-needs communities. The WTU should be considered an eligible provider of services and would be happy to extend its expertise to students, parents and communities who need them most.

Teachers, school counselors, and special subject teachers are instrumental in determining what services their students need and must be the bridge between the schools and their communities. The Washington Teachers' Union is a proud representative of over 4000 active and retired educators and knows first-hand what our students, teachers and communities require.

We are encouraged by the Community Schools Incentive Amendment Act of 2011 and look forward to a lasting partnership with DCPS throughout this process. We believe that working together is the key to creating the conditions our students, teachers and communities need. Our hope is that our partners feel the same.

Thank you for the opportunity today to appear before the Committee.

ⁱ Danna, G. (December 8, 2011). *In Post-Rhee DC, Achievement Gaps Remain Staggeringly Wide*, from <http://www.thenation.com/blog/165063/post-rhee-dc-achievement-gaps-remain-staggeringly-wide>

ⁱⁱ Chris, K. (April 23, 2011). *Cincinatti Oyler Elementary Finds a Winning Formula to Fight Poverty*, from <http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20110423/NEWS010503/304240059>