

**Testimony to the Committee on Education
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on District of Columbia Public Schools**

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Young Women's Project Peer Educator
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Hello Chairman Grosso and other Committee members. My name is James Peters and I am a junior at Bell Multicultural High School. I am sixteen years old. I enjoy playing sports and spending time with my friends. Next year I plan on joining the SGA and hospitality programs at my school. After I graduate high school, I plan on enrolling in college where I will pursue a career in law. I'm interested in a HBCU college-- Clark Atlanta, Morehouse, or maybe Bowie State.

I am here as a youth health educator at the Young Women's Project (YWP) --a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can shape policies and institutions to expand the rights and opportunities of DC youth. I work in the Peer Health and Sexuality Education campaign, a youth-adult partnership that works to improve DC teens' reproductive health by expanding comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring access to community based services, and engaging teen women and men as peer educators and decision-makers. As a peer educator, I am a leader in my school. I hold class/lunchroom presentations where I educate my peers about sexual health issues. I also train other youth health educators. The main part of my job is distributing condoms to the students at my school.

Today I would like to talk about my work as a second year youth health educator, what we have been working on since last year, D.C. health education standards and the need for more after school programs. We can improve the health standards by changing the circular and the standards make them more useful. We can also improve upon how the health teachers teach the information to the students. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

This is my second year as a health educator. This year I changed schools from Roosevelt to Bell Multicultural High School, so I needed time for everyone to get to know me. They had to get used to me. **I see the same things at Bell that I saw at Roosevelt.** Mostly, it's the men taking condoms, and only a few women. I teach a lot of people about proper condom use. I get the same questions but my answers are better this year. **I am also trying to educate the teachers about the Youth Educator Program.** A lot of teachers don't know what we do so I had to educate the teachers. One teacher thought we were promoting

sex. I told him we were there for the students that are sexually active. There is more abstinence at Bell than Roosevelt less sexually active teens, which is a positive thing.

Last year, we came to this Committee asking for your support to expand the program and put peer educator stipends in the budget. Thanks to you and other Committee members YWP has been able to expand the number of peer educators that we train and get money in the budget to pay more youth educators. We now have 58 youth educators and will have 200 in our Youth Health Educator Program (YHEP) by the end of the year. The job we are doing is important. A lot of students need this information. Paid stipends help the youth educators and help us get more students involved.

With this support we have been able to accomplish a lot. Last school year my co-workers and I distributed 11,074 external condoms, 1190 internal condoms, 1,037 flavored condoms, 1,223 packets of lubricant, and 339 dental dams. We also conducted 4,000 educational interventions. So far this school year, we have distributed 8943 external condoms, 1,198 internal condoms, 2,011 flavored condoms, 1,1573 packets of lubricant and 252 dental dams. We have conducted 11 lunchroom presentations reaching 449 teens, and 2,785 one-on-one education sessions. We will be expanding the program to include 200 youth educators through the DC Peer Educator Network.

Another thing I've been working on this year is revising DC's Health Education Standards. This is something that we brought to the Committee last year and you supported -- so thank you. Since last May, we have been able to work closely with the State Board of Education (SBOE) staff and SBOE President Jack Jacobson, and the staff and leaders at the DCPS Office of Teaching and Learning to research and draft the standards. **We started our work on this last May when we started gathering information through surveys and focus groups with more than 300 youth and then worked on specific issues during the summer.** We worked in teams to research and present the issues to the SBOE and Standards Working Group.

One thing that I learned from our research with youth -- is that health class is not very good. In the focus groups we got a lot of useful information from the youth. A lot of the youth agreed that neighborhood violence was an important issue that should be covered in health class. The youth all experienced violence in one way or other either through their friends or themselves going through a violent experience where they live.

Neighborhood violence is one of the biggest issues in the city. You can't go into neighborhood without running into violence. Youth need to know what it is and how to avoid it and how to stop the issues. We need support in dealing with that. We need adults to be talking with youth so that youth can see how community violence can be resolved. This person came from my surroundings and they made something out of themselves so I can do the same. One topic everyone differed on was nutrition. Some people feel like nutrition wasn't that important or either the youth had different views on what was health to eat. The touchy subjects were depression, suicide and bullying. Some youth didn't feel comfortable with sharing information or experiences dealing with these issues

After doing research, we broke it down into sections. I had body image and eating disorders. We also covered suicide, substance abuse, gender and sexuality, environmental health, neighborhood violence and gangs, nutrition, mental health, disease -- all of those different aspects of life come together for teenagers. Body image is something that affects me personally. We all go through it but you don't even know it. We don't talk about how what you see on TV or models affects our self esteem. It can also lead to other problems like, suicide.

This is the first year I took health. It was okay but it did not cover many topics. It's my health education credit and it is just yoga. We didn't discuss traditional health topics but I did learn a little from the class. **Luckily I know everything already from working on the health standards.** All of the things in health standards need to be covered in health class. **The new standards will really help youth. It's something that is going to affect their life.**

In order to improve health classes even more another thing we are doing at YWP is training the DCPS health teachers. We are training 150 health teachers -- showing them how we view health and what our health experience is, the issues that are important to us, and how to be more hands on. We had to come up with activities, so we can show our health teachers how we would like them to teach and ways to be more interactive. We came up with role reversal. We are setting up a lesson plan and then they teach and we give them feedback. I am excited about it. It's something different. **Students don't really get a chance to critique the teachers on anything they do.**

We also need more after school programs. No one is really in the school after 3:15. Bell has some

activities --mostly sports. I am currently in a after school tutoring program where Howard student come to help us with our homework and mentor us. Roosevelt did not really have anything. There was night school and a program to help prepare for the DC CAS. I tried to get a homework club started so that students had somewhere to focus and where people could help you. You could have students who were already doing the subject helping other students. Teachers and counselors could also be available. You could have a math club for people who really knew math well and room writing or other projects that you were working on. Math club. People who knew math really well. if you had a project you were working on. I have a power point I am working on and I was doing it at home. It would be great if there was some where after school I could work on it. **A lot of youth need a place to do their homework. It's hard to focus on home. It's loud. And some people don't even have a home. People also need working computers. If there was after school programs, we could try to get our community service hours. Right now -- no one really helps us to get them and it's very last minute. Students don't know about what programs are out there.** A lot of kids would like to do sports but they are not playing for the team. Some friends go to rec centers and play there.

Overall, I like Bell. I feel at home there. It's a nice environment. Teachers really push college and we have a lot of help. They are more realistic and honest with you and try to find a college that works for you. The class requirements are set up to prep you for college. I took the Capstone class. We had to write essays and find out what college was best for our grades and skill set.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony, and I hope you take my suggestions into consideration.