

Testimony to the Committee on Education**For the Performance Oversight Hearing on District of Columbia Public Schools****Rahel Mideksa****Young Women's Project, Peer Advocate****February 18, 2015**

Hello, my name is Rahel Mideksa I am an empowered woman on the pursuit to change the world. I attend Bell Multicultural High School as an 11th grader. I live in ward 1 and I want to go to school at King's College, where I want to major in bioethics and international human rights. I want to open a non-profit similar to The Young Women's Project, where I currently work as a peer advocate. I never want to let money nor is the lack of knowledge be the reason why someone is denied of their entitlement to Liberty. In addition I say this because we live in a society where the individuals with the power comes with money and some individuals are even lacking that basic knowledge of what their rights are so they are not aware of their privilege to liberty.

Today I would like to call out some of the problems that I see happening every day, which are Immigrant Youth, graduation requirements as well as risk students.

Let me begin talking about the recent immigrant community in my high school. The United States is facing a significant challenge in serving the immigrant youth. Over a million are entering US public schools a year. Most will be from different countries that have adapted to different form of cultures so when they come to big rural sites, they will feel out of place. They will automatically face a language barrier since English is not their native language, they will then be at risk. Many will be facing culture shock, poverty and social adaptation and it is beyond crucial to have a support system implemented in schools so that immigrant teen can cope with. Bell Multicultural High School is a very diverse school. We have many immigrant students are coming in record numbers. So our school needs to adapt to their needs, just like they are being asked to adapt to their new homes, schools and communities. Take AP English, for example. This course is required in my school for 11th and 12th graders for both years However, there are students who are barely speaking English in that class. Having this requirement does make our school look more academically centered, however fails certain students, especially English Language Learners by placing them where they shouldn't be. Every day I see teachers trying their best to help the students catch up and it's not fair. The system is not supposed to fail us. Also there are 25-35 students with one teacher which is pretty

inconvenient for all of us. Believe me I'm not completely degrading the whole system nor am I ungrateful of AP classes, but I do want to highlight that immigrant students are being deprived of a basic support system before they are asked to meet academic requirements set for the rest of the student body.

Bell does have great resources for immigrant youth in place that should be expanded. In fact, we have program called dual immersion program where students will be able to take classes like science and history in Spanish. However this simply addresses one of the factors that immigrant youth are experiencing, the language barrier. Often, immigrant students find it difficult for to be attentive in a classroom, because we have many other worries in our lives. I am speaking from experience because I was one of those students who felt displaced in my own school. I came to America at the age of 9 from Ethiopia. I was very young and I felt out of place with children who were accustomed to customs unlike mine. I had nice teachers who were supportive of me, but I should have received more support in my transition. As an immigrant student, I didn't know how I could possibly learn inside a classroom when I couldn't cope with my surroundings. I was becoming stressed and I wanted to go back to my home country. My mom was my support system in those times that I needed her I suggest that perhaps buddy/mentor system should be implemented and health classes teach students ways to cope with adaptation so that students are not overwhelmed by stress and anxiety.

Immigrant students are not the only people who need more support from our school. We are beginning or are in the middle of their adolescent years. We face so much stress , and we need to know how to balance our time and not collapse. Bell has a lot of requirements for graduation. While you're a senior at Bell, you have to complete a portfolio presentation. After every advisory we have to present in what we learned and how it relates to the school's theme of social justice--we would discuss the project we completed and then explain the relevance of it to a social justice issue that is occurring in our society. Portfolio presentation are used to merely prepare us for college presentation.

In addition to this, we are one of the few students in DC who are required to graduate with 28 credits which is harder than it seems. It has even been harder with the new grading systems which has completely affected teens all over DCPS schools. Now, my projects weigh the same amount as my homework. and This completely degrades the efforts and hard work that I had put into-

To conclude, here are my recommendations:

- I suggest that students are not required to take AP class like English especially if they are struggling with English. In fact a different support system should be implemented so that for - students could be able to catch up and get attentive help from teachers.
- I also recommend that we inform more students about the study abroad programs with the language they know, so that they embrace their language and be well informed about opportunities that come with the ability to speak different language.
- I also suggest that electives are added so that students could be able to communicate about different topics and bring awareness to their specific issues, like immigrant teen issues, feminists of color issues, etc.

As a side note, to echo in what my coworkers said about the DCPS budget. I was also trying to get information about the DCPS budget process. We found out that there is a youth hearing on the budget with the Chancellor, so I went to my principal to see if I could participate and she informed me that two representatives had already been chosen. I pestered her about it and she said I could go unofficially to observe, but not participate. The only way I found out about this hearing was from YWP, and I was amazed that so few people knew about the hearing considering it's the schools budget. Only SGA members were allowed to participate, which gives no opportunity for the rest of students to participate. So I also recommend a more transparent and inclusive process.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.