

**Testimony to the Committee on Education
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on DCPS**

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Good morning Council Member Grosso, my name is Taliyah Cook, I'm in the 10th grade, and I attend Calvin Coolidge SHS. I am 15 years old, turning 16 the 5th of March and I enjoy doing hair and dealing with cosmetology. I would love to work in something related to cosmetology fields or become a lawyer one day. I plan to work hard and go to college to achieve all my long-term goals.

I am currently one of 58 Youth Health Educators at The Young Women's Project. The Young Women's Project is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of young women so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. While working at the Young Women's Project I educate young people about Sex Ed and I distribute condoms at my school. My teacher informed me about the Young Women's Project and I decided that I could take time to help out my community with their lives. She told me that they were having a job that hired young people to educate youth about safe sex that pays peer educators \$7.25 an hour. While working in this organization, I have learned how to properly put an internal (female condom) and external (male condoms) on. Furthermore, YWP has given me a description of the internal and external of a female's vagina and description of the male's internal anatomy. Not only have they informed me about proper condom use and anatomy, they have taught me about periods, STI'S, healthy relationships, contraception, etc. I also learned about these things at the doctor's, at Georgia Avenue clinic. Some of the things I like at YWP are: getting paid, teaching youth about safer sex, getting more education about sex and ways to prevent it, and meeting new people; however, when you attempt to educate young people about safe sex they refuse to take notice and receive the information needed. One of the reason I think they don't attempt to receive this information is because they may believe we are lying or maybe it's just Coolidge as a school.

I'm here to testify about the situation in my school, from the academics, to kids missing school, and the school lunch. Thank you for listening to what I have to say.

YWP is not one of my first jobs; I have worked at Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) during the summer. I worked at Emery Recreation center at I.M.A.G.E camp. This job required me to be a better person as a whole, have good participation skills, be cooperative, and have good people skills. At Emery we had sessions that taught us how to make better decisions for our lives such as, going to college and staying out of trouble. In addition, we went on field trips as reward for our cooperation and good work. Also

we played kickball and went to a kickball tournament, which taught us how to work as a team. I enjoyed the program because we always had fun and no violence was involved through the whole course.

Calvin Coolidge Senior High School is very disorganized and some teachers lack teaching skills; they cheat us out of our education. The teachers at Coolidge do not fully apply themselves to teach us students. For instance, when I am in Honors Geometry they're teaching us all the things we learned in Algebra I instead of Geometry. Not only are we not learning Geometry, we are learning the same things as all the other non-honors classes, so we are on the same track as all the other students. My friends who are not in honors courses tell me that they receive the same work as us. We all receive the exact same assignment in Honors Geometry, Geometry Part 1, and 2, therefore, I believe they cheat us out of our education. Honors classes are supposed to be ahead of the other classes and already have the basics taught. I would love to stay at Coolidge only because I feel there's one teacher, Mr. Igoudjil, who really pushes us. He doesn't let us fall behind when we are slacking and he tries to give us the education that we did not receive in our younger ages. I really appreciate how he applies himself to replace our education and tries to advance us to be college-ready. Also, he prepares us for life itself and help one's who struggle at home. I will take all of his successful knowledge and take in to college. I need great education in high school because after I am finished, I would love to go to college at Harvard. I perceive Harvard as an advanced and wonderful school that will actually prepare you for all of your fields in life. So if I could change schools, I would transfer to School without Walls because they have a good education structure and they have college classes that may help me get into Harvard. I strongly believe that Coolidge should offer some of the structures that Walls has such as: college classes and advanced learning structures.

Sometimes it's difficult to do my job because when I'm distributing condoms, we're handing them out to the same people because Coolidge does not have many kids there. Mostly there are 15- 21 kids in my classes at Calvin Coolidge Senior High School. What makes it even worse, the kids do not show up most of the time. Maybe teens are late to school because of the lack of education they receive or because they always get marked absent when they are there. School begins at 8:45 and they start marking kids late after 8:45. When you are marked late or come to school too late they decide to mark you absence. In fact, when you do not make it to first period they mark you absent for the entire day. I think school should still start at 8:45, but you should not be marked absent until 9:30, instead you should be marked tardy. In this case, more students will make an effort to get up and come to school.

The school lunches at Calvin Coolidge Senior High School lunches are very disgusting - I do not think they cook right - they always over cook it or under cook it. Also, the ingredients in their food are too healthy and it taste awful. I think this is wrong because they are causing students not to eat, and not everyone has money to bring lunch money to school every day. Most of the time people eat at the salad bar or eat chicken nuggets because it is the only decent tasting food. Sometimes the salad is not fresh and they run out of lettuce and dressing. Furthermore, there are rarely chicken nuggets; therefore, kids do not really have options to choose from causing them not to eat. Our JROTC group sell snacks now such as chips, candy, Gatorade, chocolate, and more. Also some of the staff at our school decided to sell nachos and hotdogs because the students were not eating every day. This gives students a variety of things to eat now.

At Calvin Coolidge Senior High School it is very filthy and terrible. They do not take care of their school at all. Sometimes they have big roaches crawling throughout the school, and they have mice running around the school. This is very unsanitary and it really makes me not want to go there or eat their lunches. I do not feel comfortable in my school; I do not leave any of my belongings on the floor because I am terrified that their critters will crawl on them. I think Coolidge is the way it is because it's old and no one really cares about anything for the school anymore.

To conclude, here are my recommendations:

- More advanced education and advanced teachers will be great for Coolidge. I do not think they really have to change the teachers; however, they should teach them better teaching skills. Furthermore, I believe teachers should move from basic lessons and teach students more college level work so students could know what to expect in college. If this is done, Coolidge will have many students taking the lead of their education and we would have more working students.
- After school groups like for more learning instead of credit recovery and sports. After school groups are important because slow learners can come after school and get their work done, and it gives students study time. After school programs would make Coolidge a better school as a whole because it helps students receive better education in better learning environments. In Coolidge classes students are very disruptive and rowdy, so this makes it even harder for students to receive information.
- Coolidge is a very unsanitary place. I would appreciate if they make an effort to rebuild the school or remodel it. If they make Coolidge a better looking environment then this will result in more kids coming to school and more students enrolling. Most people think Coolidge is bad because of their education and just the way it looks; therefore, they fear enrolling their child there.
- Coolidge needs a complete change in their lunchroom. They need better lunches, cleaner spaces, and more food varieties. This is most important because students need to eat, but also because unsanitary food can cause health problems. If they decide to change their lunches more students will eat and they would not have to worry about angry moms or health scenes.