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Via email: ryoung@dcpcsb.org and public.comment@dcpcsb.org

March 19, 2018

Rashida Young
Senior Manager
Equity and Fidelity Team
DC Public Charter School Board
3333 14th Street, NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20010

Re: Comments on proposed new Credit Recovery Policy

Dear Ms. Young:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed policy regarding Credit Recovery for public charter schools (PCS). I am submitting these comments on behalf of Children's Law Center (CLC).¹ With more than 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, Children's Law Center reaches 1 out of every 9 children in DC's poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. Many of the children we represent attend DC public charter schools. Many have disabilities that impact their education and many are in foster care. Our comments are based on our experience representing these children and families.

Credit Recovery is an important tool for helping students who fall off track gain a pathway to graduation. As PCSB and other District education leaders know and as studied in DC's Graduation Pathways work and RAISE DC's Disconnected Youth Change Network, far too many youth in the District face risk factors that are barriers to success in high school and to graduation on time. Unfortunately, many of the children in foster care and children with disabilities with whom we work need access to Credit Recovery. For children in foster care, sometimes changing schools, between states or LEAs, is beyond their control. When youth in foster care move schools in the middle of a school year they struggle to get credits recognized, sometimes it is impossible for them to continue in courses they started in another school, and sometimes they have to pick up in the middle of courses, which is disorienting and difficult. Moves between school years also bring challenges with being placed in the right courses and sequencing of instruction as youth cross state lines or between LEAs. For youth with disabilities, in our experience, many have limited basic literacy and numeracy skills despite their capacity to learn. That makes meeting the expectations in general education classes difficult even with special education services. We see many youth in foster care or with disabilities fail courses because of these challenges, and thus need credit recovery and other individualized strategies to complete courses.

We are concerned about the need to preserve flexibility for schools to administer Credit Recovery and similar tools to help students have a second chance to learn material on a pace that

will give them hope to graduate with peers. We are concerned that the definition of Credit Recovery proposed in the policy states that a student must have previously taken and failed a course to earn credit. The proposed policy seems to contemplate that either an offering is “Credit Recovery” or it is substitute “competency-based learning,” but there are other structures of helping a student who is currently in a course recover their grades that we believe should be encouraged in this policy, to help students remain in school.

We are concerned the proposed policy does not ensure that schools have flexibility to help students recover grades and credit while in a course. At the most recent Graduation Pathways Summit,² the topic of simultaneous credit recovery enrollment was discussed as a practice worthy of consideration. On a granular level, *unit* or lesson recovery may be a promising practice to help students recover a grade in a course concurrently, rather than have to experience failure and retake an entire course.³ For youth in foster care moving schools, unit recovery may be a particularly useful tool to catch a student up on material that was covered in a different order in a course joined mid-year or to allow them to finish a partial credit/grade from a course that does not fit in their schedule at a new school. It is our understanding that DCPS was considering or piloting unit recovery and PCS schools might have been as well. Although slightly different, Credit-recovery-like co-requisites are a common practices in some colleges, to help students get remediation in a subject yet not have to stay in college an extra year. All of these ideas and practices exist because students get discouraged by failures or having to spend extra years in school. Combatting discouragement, to keep youth engaged in school, is important to the futures of many youth. We recommend that the policy clearly indicate that other structures of unit recovery or extra supports⁴ to help a student have a second chance to learn material while in the course are allowed and encouraged by this policy.

With special focus on children in foster care, we are concerned that the policy would not allow flexibility to meet their individual needs with unit and credit recovery. We have advocated for years and are hopeful that DC will adopt procedures and policies to recognize partial and half-credits that youth in foster care with Child and Family Services Agency or involved with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) deserve (because they have grades in the middle of courses but the government moved the youth).⁵ Other states have adopted such policies. As it stands now, youth in these systems, who DC should encourage to engage and complete education, are discouraged because they do not get credit for learning and work they have done. Homeless students may have similar challenges to complete courses if they must move schools. Flexibility with Credit Recovery or other structures like unit recovery would allow those students to finish a course that they *have not yet failed*, but because of scheduling issues cannot complete in the same year. Without such flexibility, a youth in foster care would have to repeat a whole class even with a half-credit, which is discouraging. We strongly recommend that this policy hold open the door for foster youth, youth in DYRS care, and homeless youth to receive partial credit using credit recovery or similar tools in courses they have not yet failed.

We are also concerned that the proposed policy may not allow flexibility that youth and schools may need to individualize implementation. Credit recovery in many District schools (and Nationally) utilizes computer applications. Students can go through the material at their own pace and some allow log ins outside of “courses” so that students can spend additional time on particular content at home. Requiring that the school’s policy state when and when credit recovery “courses” take place might be interpreted to indicate that a specific time and place must be where students access credit recovery and would not allow flexibility for student learning in the credit recovery applications to take place as individual students need it.

Lastly, we are concerned that the policy is silent on the subject of accommodations and services to ensure access to Credit Recovery, including such recovery included in Summer School, for children with disabilities.⁶ Children and youth with disabilities who struggled to pass their classes in during regular school hours with the special education services in their IEPs certainly need supports in order to have equal access to summer school and Credit Recovery programs if they are to have equal opportunity. Since falling behind contributes to students with disabilities dropping out of school, schools offer specialized instruction, related services, and accommodations in summer school and credit recovery in order to help the most vulnerable students make progress toward graduation. We recommend that PCSB include that the school-level policy must address how the Credit Recovery and summer school program will provide non-discrimination and equal access for children with disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Credit Recovery Policy. If you have questions, we would be happy to discuss further. You may reach me at (202) 467-4900 ext. 580 or rmurphy@childrenslawcenter.org.

Respectfully,



Renee Murphy
Supervising Attorney - Policy

¹ Children’s Law Center fights so every child in DC can grow up with a loving family, good health and a quality education. Judges, pediatricians and families turn to us to advocate for children who are abused or neglected, who aren’t learning in school, or who have health problems that can’t be solved by medicine alone. With more than 100 staff and hundreds of pro bono lawyers, we reach 1 out of every 9 children in DC’s poorest neighborhoods – more than 5,000 children and families each year. And, we multiply this impact by advocating for city-wide solutions that benefit children.

² See presentation from the Graduation Pathways Summit on November 6, 2017, Workshop B: Expanding Access to Credit Recovery, accessed at http://www.raisedc.org/s/2017GradPathwaysSummit_WorkshopB_171107.pptx RAISE DC’s “The Graduation Pathways Project began in summer 2013 to widely engage education agencies, school leaders, and civic partners to act on a shared vision that every student – no matter how far off track he or she may be – has a path to graduation.” <http://www.raisedc.org/graduationpathways>

³ One example is Atlanta’s unit recovery for middle and high school. <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/47915>

⁴ Supports and unit recovery could utilize the computer programs that Credit Recovery uses to teach content, although they do not have to.

⁵ We have less experience with homeless youth, but suspect that similar challenges affect them when changing schools mid-year. Currently, CLC, PCSB, and many other stakeholders are engaged in a Working Group on the Education of Youth in Government Care convened by the DC Council Committee on Education to examine and more forward these types of policy and process fixes to ensure that youth in

care of CFSA and DYRS have the ability to gain credits as they move between schools, in addition to other changes to increase quality or better engage youth in care in their education.

⁶ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to summer school and credit recovery offerings, as does the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in some cases.