DRAFT DC Education Research Collaborative Research Agenda
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Introduction

DC's public schools are lauded by many as a model for other struggling systems—the city has seen dramatic improvement over the past 15 years after historically being one of the lowest-performing school systems in the nation. The headlines also belie challenges, both pervasive and new. Amid bright spots of joy as schools return to in-person learning, students are navigating the academic, mental, and emotional turmoil of the Covid-19 pandemic, educators face challenges as they never have before, and families struggle to access resources for their children in a city eager to continue the momentum of its past success. In short, the DC education community faces a number of urgent needs.

The DC Education Research Collaborative brings together the area's top research organizations to provide the research evidence and answers that inform and empower families and caregivers, educators, policymakers, and community members to meet those urgent needs. The idea for the DC Collaborative – a research-practice partnership – was conceived before the pandemic. But our work is even more critical now, as the DC public education community not only seeks new approaches to the city's longstanding educational challenges but also comes together to mitigate the pandemic's effects on student learning, student well-being, and equity.

This research agenda is a guide for how the Collaborative will focus its inquiries over the next 5 years. Developed jointly by educators, parents, administrators, and researchers, our agenda is not an exhaustive list of the questions we will research, but rather a statement of the goals DC's education community has for its students, and the knowledge gaps we need filled to get there. To fill those gaps, the Collaborative will create robust, meaningful, and actionable information to support decisions that improve outcomes and advance equity for DC's public education students. Throughout, we will center our values of collaboration, equity, independence, quality, relevance and transparency.

The results of the research conducted under the agenda will inform DC education stakeholders as they make decisions about policies, programs, and processes. These decisions guide and support practitioners in their work. Along the way, we will consult closely with school communities to ensure Collaborative projects are indeed useful to those doing the work in schools and neighborhoods. Where necessary, we will adjust and adapt. The research agenda provides a frame for the Collaborative's work, but does not limit us from taking up new, urgent questions whose answers would help improve outcomes and advance equity, especially for DC's most underserved, disadvantaged, or marginalized students.

How we developed this research agenda

The Collaborative's Advisory Committee is a group of approximately two dozen stakeholders initially appointed by the DC Mayor and Council, and representatives from DC's many education institutions, as laid out in the Collaborative's authorizing legislation. The Research Council is composed of 15 organizations who together make up the research arm of the research-practice partnership and will, along with practitioner partners, conduct the projects

This research agenda was drafted by a working group consisting of five members of the Collaborative's Advisory Committee and five members of the Collaborative's Research Council.

To guide its work, the Research Agenda Working Group used feedback from Collaborative brainstorming sessions that were informed by previous testimony and materials shared prior to the launch of the

Collaborative, data from a survey fielded by Collaborative staff, as well as comments from a public listening session and four separate focus groups. The full Advisory Committee provided input throughout the development process.

By including the people who will use the results of the Collaborative's research—practitioners, education leaders, and policymakers—in the development process, our work will be different from much other education research. The Collaborative's work will be meaningful, because it is based on the actual needs and work of practitioners. It will be trustworthy because it centers the voice, experience, and expertise of the education community. And it will be actionable because it will ask and answer relevant, timely questions for an audience of practitioners and decision-makers, not researchers.

How we will use this research agenda

This research agenda consists of six focus areas. Each represents a goal our community agreed was important for education in DC over the next five years. Within each focus area, there are guiding questions. These questions are ones the community identified as critical to working toward each goal.

On its own, each guiding question is too broad to be answered by a single research project. Rather, questions are answered by the body of evidence carefully built by multiple projects, each with its own unique and specific research questions, methodology, and findings. In this way, the agenda focuses (but does not restrict) the projects researchers can undertake and allows for flexibility and creativity in the breadth of projects that can be conducted over the years. Individual projects can also refer to multiple guiding questions, or link two or more questions together.

The research agenda additionally allows the Collaborative to leverage existing research to answer DC-specific questions. And it gives researchers the opportunity to address stakeholder concerns that their knowledge and experiences go unheard because that knowledge is not communicated to decision-makers in a methodological, systemic way. The body of evidence used to answer each guiding question will include rigorous new projects undertaken by Collaborative research partners, prior rigorous research conducted in DC and elsewhere, and careful collection and understanding of the existing knowledge held by the community.

Our research agenda

1. Equity in learning outcomes, particularly for students in poverty
   - What knowledge and skills do young students need to be successful in future grades, and how can they be supported in gaining it?
   - What are ways to measure student learning in a valid, reliable, and equitable way, for all of DC's student groups?
   - Given the disparities in learning outcomes that exist among student groups (both within schools and across DC), what strategies for increasing growth and closing opportunity gaps are effective in reducing these disparities?
2. Students who are prepared for success after high school
   - How can student success after high school be measured and predicted?
   - What strategies, programs, and opportunities for students during K-12 improve student success after high school, and how can students access these opportunities effectively and equitably?

- What are DC students' goals for themselves, how can they be involved in determining and attaining their path after high school, and what supports do they need to achieve success?

3. School environments that support student social, emotional, physical, and academic well-being
   - How are student well-being and school climate and culture defined and measured?
   - What approaches, interventions, and supports improve student well-being and school climate and culture?
   - What factors outside of school affect DC students' well-being (especially with respect to student populations who are traditionally underserved), and how can schools address these challenges?
   - What social, emotional, and academic skills do students need to acquire in order to achieve overall wellness and academic success, and how can schools ensure DC students attain these skills?

4. A high-quality, diverse educator workforce
   - What are the gaps between the educator workforce needed, current workforce employed, and characteristics of future educators preparing to enter the workforce, inclusive of demographics, subject matter expertise, and experience level?
   - What training, professional learning opportunities, and supports are needed to prepare educators, improve effectiveness, and reduce turnover to support DC students' diverse needs, experiences, and backgrounds?
   - What policies, practices, and programs attract and retain a highly effective, diverse educator workforce, especially those who are current District residents and future graduates of DC schools?

5. Schools that are responsive to family/caregiver and community needs
   - How do LEAs and schools assess the needs of the communities they serve?
   - What are the most effective family/caregiver engagement practices, that successfully involve all families and lead to increased trust, support, and outcomes for students?
   - How does the DC education system incorporate community needs and input into its decision-making, and how can this be improved?
   - What information about students and schools do DC's families/caregivers and communities need to make decisions about and support their students' education, and what is the most effective way of communicating that information?

6. Adequate access to and equitable distribution of resources
   - How should funding for DC's schools be distributed such that all students have the resources they need to succeed, and that opportunity gaps within and across schools are eliminated?
   - What policies, procedures, and structures are needed such that all students are able to access a high-quality school?
   - What mechanisms could make DC schools more socioeconomically, socially, and culturally diverse?