

A RESOLUTION

22-516

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

June 5, 2018

To declare the existence of an emergency with respect to the need to ensure that students who were deemed ineligible for promotion to the next grade or graduation or who received a reduced grade for a course due solely to unexcused absences accrued between August 8, 2017, and April 6, 2018, will be promoted to the next grade or graduate or not receive a reduced grade for the 2017-2018 school year.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the "School Promotion and Graduation Fairness Emergency Declaration Resolution of 2018".

Sec. 2. (a) There exists an immediate need to ensure academically qualified students are promoted to the next grade or are able to graduate by the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

(b) In the 2015-2016 school year, District of Columbia Public Schools ("DCPS") announced a new Secondary School Grading Policy that linked attendance in a course to a student's final grade.

(c) In November 2017, local and national media outlets published several stories alleging that DCPS had improperly allowed many students to graduate.

(d) In response to these reports, Mayor Muriel Bowser directed the Office of the State Superintendent of Education ("OSSE") to analyze student-level attendance and graduation outcomes at all public high schools.

(e) On January 16, 2018, OSSE released a report that found that in the 2014-2015 through the 2016-2017 school years, seniors graduated despite failing to meet attendance requirements.

(f) OSSE also contracted with performance-improvement firm Alvarez & Marsal to conduct an audit and investigation of DCPS high schools' graduation policy adherence during the 2016-2017 school year.

(g) On January 26, 2018, Alvarez & Marsal released the "Final Report: District of Columbia Public Schools Audit and Investigation" ("Report"), which found many inconsistencies with DCPS' policies and processes, including the misuse of credit recovery, failure to follow attendance-related grading policies, and a lack of training, support, and oversight from DCPS across all high schools.

(h) The Report also noted that the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations do not clearly outline the standards for grade reduction and failure due to absences or the operation of credit recovery programs.

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(i) Additionally, the Report noted that high school administrators and staff misinterpreted a clause in the Washington Teacher's Union Collective Bargaining Agreement to mean that teachers have complete autonomy over how they grade students and that the attendance-related grading policy was an optional guideline rather than a mandate.

(j) On February 28, 2018, DCPS sent a response to Councilmember David Grosso's February 12, 2018, letter stating that all scheduled in-person training sessions to review attendance and grading policies with high school teams concluded on March 13, 2018, in the middle of the third term of the 2017-2018 school year, which ended on April 6, 2018.

(k) From the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year through March 13, 2018, students relied on teachers' understanding of the discretionary application of DCPS attendance and grading policies.

(l) The earliest due date for final grades for the 2017-2018 school year was May 31, 2018.

(m) Therefore, Council approval is necessary to ensure that students who were penalized by being deemed ineligible for promotion to the next grade or graduation or who received a reduced grade for a course due solely to unexcused absences accrued between August 8, 2017, and April 6, 2018, will be promoted to the next grade or graduate or not receive a reduced grade for the 2017-2018 school year.

Sec. 3. The Council of the District of Columbia determines that the circumstances enumerated in section 2 constitute emergency circumstances making it necessary that the School Promotion and Graduation Fairness Emergency Amendment Act of 2018 be adopted after a single reading.

Sec. 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.