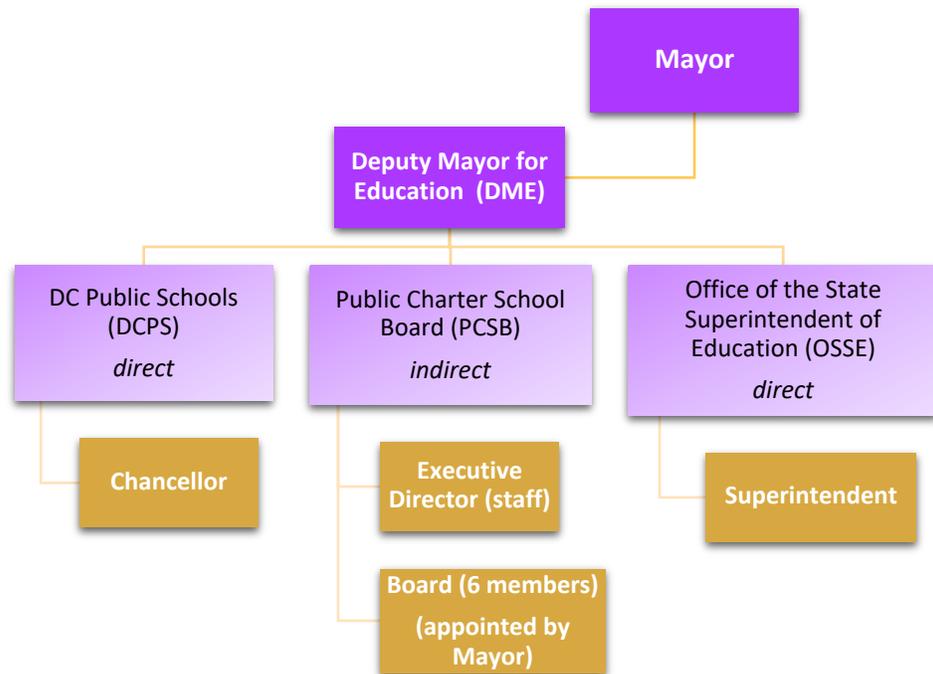




New Leadership, New Vision

The education system in DC is very unique relative to the rest of the nation. Because we do not have an elected school board, the Mayor’s office sets the vision for education in our city. To lead this work, the Mayor appoints a Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) to oversee all of our public schools. Reporting to the DME is the Chancellor, the leader of DCPS where about half of the students in DC attend school. Responsible for setting the educational priorities for the District as well as the power to determine how DCPS spends its education funding, their decisions directly affect school staff, students, and families.

This past year, these two educational leadership positions became vacant. Jennie Niles, former DME, and Antwan Wilson, former Chancellor of DC Public Schools, both stepped down in February of 2018 after it was revealed that they bypassed the District’s lottery system to place Wilson’s daughter in one of the District’s top public high schools. Currently, Ahnna Smith (Former Chief of Staff to Jennie Niles) and Amanda Alexander (Former Chief of Elementary Schools) are serving as interim DME and Chancellor, respectively, as the new search begins.



How has DC Selected Previous Education Leaders?

During the last search for a new Chancellor in 2016, Mayor Bowser formed the “Rising Leadership Committee” to assist with the selection process. The panel consisted of DCPS principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members all hoping to give input on what they wanted to see in their next leader.

Unfortunately, this process was not as community-centered as all stakeholders would have liked. During Chancellor Wilson’s nomination hearing, a diverse array of witnesses testified not necessarily against Wilson himself, but expressed intense dissatisfaction with the selection process. Many noted that the Mayor’s selection process did not adequately incorporate community feedback or work to include diverse and relevant voices in the conversation. Wilson’s experience and potential initially pacified some of the public’s concern, but with his recent removal, **those left out of the conversation feel even more motivated to have a say in the next selection process.**



What Could a Community-Centered Process Look Like?

In 2013, DCPS went through the challenging process of redrawing school boundaries. Because these boundaries determine a student’s right to a particular school--and their ability to apply elsewhere or transfer--the results held major implications for all families in DC. In light of this, then Mayor Vince Gray created the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment to garner community feedback and inform final recommendations. This committee took a total of ten months to conduct a robust community engagement effort, including focus groups, online surveys, citywide community dialogues, and a volunteer working group, to intentionally bring parent and community voice into the conversation.

Despite the complex and inevitably controversial task, the work done by the committee to seek out the opinion of those it’s decisions would directly affect truly paid off. With many competing needs, it wasn’t about everyone getting what they wanted, but about a collective effort to make our schools more equitable and accessible to everyone. Because the community felt they were given ample opportunity to share their feedback and that they were genuinely listened to, the school boundary recommendations were accepted and implemented.

How Can Parents Help Shape the Future of Education in DC?

Parents know first-hand what the most urgent needs are in our schools. With their input driving the vision of our education system, we can ensure our next leaders are the right match for our kids. To get involved:

- Call on the Mayor to ensure extensive community engagement as we search for new education leaders
- Contact your Councilmember to ask to make this issue a priority
- Attend any upcoming LSAT meetings, listening or working groups to provide input and feedback



PAVE Parent Leader Olivia Chase speaks with Education Committee Chair David Grosso at PAVE’s DC Parent Voice and Choice Week Event.

Learn More:

- ❖ Read more about how school district leaders influence on student learning: <https://bit.ly/2wdTteC>
- ❖ See The Education Trust’s presentation on practices and priorities of successful school districts and their leaders: <https://bit.ly/2rmaCNS>