ODCA Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

ODCA Selects Firm for Public Education Data Audit

WASHINGTON, March 13, 2019—The Office the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) has hired the consulting firm Data Ethics of Rochester, N.Y., for its report, **A Study of Education Data Governance, Management, Use, and Accuracy**, as called for by the *District of Columbia Education Research Practice Partnership Establishment and Audit Act of 2018*.

The legislation, approved in December 2018, calls for "an audit of data-management and data-collection practices" of the District's public education agencies. The Data Ethics LLC team has significant experience working with and for education agencies at the state and local level on data governance, analytics, and privacy.

As outlined in the contract with ODCA, Data Ethics will:

- Generate a detailed inventory of existing education-related data elements currently collected at the individual level (student or staff), linked longitudinally and to other records. This detailed inventory should cover at least the past six years.
- Assess data management systems and sources, including where these systems reside, how they are governed and how they interact.
- Research and determine best practices in education data governance and management and assess the extent to which the District is utilizing best practices.
- Conduct analyses of the data itself. Several individual-level data analyses should serve as a benchmark on data quality, accessibility, and use.
- Gather and synthesize best practices for data sharing agreements between research practice partnerships (RPPs) and state and local education agencies, including what the agencies receive.
- Produce a draft and final written report to be released publicly by ODCA.

"These tasks will meet the data audit requirements of the research-practice partnership legislation and help the new RPP begin its important work with a firm understanding of what information we have, and what additional information we might need," said D.C. Auditor Kathy Patterson.

The education data audit represents the next step in an effort called for in both the 2007 education reform legislation and a 2015 report by the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies. The *Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007* called for the

"development of a comprehensive, District-wide data system that integrates and tracks data across education, justice, and human service agencies." The NRC's "summative report" on the impact of mayoral control published in 2015, *An Evaluation of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape,* called for a comprehensive data warehouse that would have information readily accessible for researchers, educators, parents, and the public.

The need for a data inventory was further bolstered during ODCA's recent *Study of Enrollment in D.C. Public Schools Including Current Methodology and Future Projections.* During the early stages of research, ODCA consultants spent hours cleaning data and creating the longitudinal dataset needed for the analysis.

"The audit will produce valuable information needed by education researchers who want to work with the District's practitioners," Patterson said. "It will help our education leaders identify any obstacles that may exist so they can work collaboratively and productively with the research community."

Beyond the data audit, the next step in developing the District's education RPP called for in the December legislation will be collaboration between the Mayor and the Council to jointly select a research partner and fill positions on a new advisory committee to develop a five-year education research agenda.

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