



PRESS RELEASE

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OSSE Uncovers Suspected Residency Fraud in Review of School Enrollment Records

After its first year reviewing of all DCPS and Public Charter Schools, OSSE makes referrals to the Attorney General

(Washington, DC) – Stemming from the investigation started during its annual enrollment audit and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s (OSSE) increased emphasis on residency enforcement, OSSE announced the results of its in-depth, District-wide residency fraud investigation. Specifically, as a result of the investigation at Duke Ellington School of the Arts (Ellington), OSSE will forward 164 cases of suspected residency fraud at Ellington to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for further review. In light of those results, moving forward, OSSE is directing DCPS to provide a greater level of oversight of enrollment staff and procedures at Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

The report is available on [the OSSE website](http://osse.dc.gov), osse.dc.gov.

“District of Columbia schools must be accessible first to District families,” said State Superintendent Hanseul Kang. “We take residency fraud seriously. While we want to be sensitive to complex family situations that may make it more challenging to provide residency documentation, these cases from Duke Ellington School of the Arts cause significant concern and represent a serious lapse in oversight at the school level and at DC Public Schools. We are directing DCPS and Duke Ellington to put in place additional personnel, resources and training to ensure that all schools follow proper residency verification procedures, and that only District families and a small number of tuition-paying, non-residents have the ability to access our city’s schools.”

Ellington Investigation Results

OSSE’s investigation found that many student files did not have the documentation required to prove bona fide District residency. Of the 570 student files OSSE investigated at Ellington:

- 304 students are deemed to be residents. These students were determined to be residents of the District through a review of the evidence gathered during the investigation.
- 46 students are deemed to be non-residents with existing tuition payment agreements with the District.
- 164 students are deemed to be non-residents without sufficient documentation to prove residency. These students either did not have sufficient documentation or a non-residency determination has been made as a result of the preliminary investigation. These students do not have an active tuition agreement with the District.
- 56 students are still under investigation by OSSE, as the information obtained about their actual place of residence is inconclusive after the investigation. OSSE will give these families a final opportunity to prove their District residency.

In some of the non-resident findings, students had residency documents that, upon first review, appeared to be sufficient and adequate documentation of bona fide District residency. However, upon deeper investigation, they were deemed to be insufficient or fraudulent.

OSSE is referring all findings of non-residency at Ellington to OAG – a total of 164 cases. OSSE is not directing families with students at Ellington or at other schools to withdraw students immediately, as individual families may attempt to resolve their non-residency issues with OAG for a limited time. However, all students must annually demonstrate their residency to re-enroll in District schools, and non-residents must pay all tuition owed by July 15, 2018.

Corrective Plan for Ellington

OSSE is issuing a corrective action plan for Ellington and DCPS to require a review of staffing and internal controls, a plan for staff independent of Ellington to oversee residency verification and enrollment for the 2018-19 school year, and re-training of all DCPS registrars. OSSE will also require verification of 100 percent of all residency documentation at Ellington for the next five years at the time of the annual enrollment audit. OSSE will also provide all of its case documentation and investigative outcomes to OAG and the Office of the Inspector General for further investigation of Ellington staff and administration.

Additionally, as part of OSSE's annual enrollment audit of other District and Public Charter Schools, 111 families were identified as non-residents who were subsequently unable to prove residency. Those families are being referred to OAG.

Background on OSSE Oversight

OSSE, the state education agency for the District of Columbia, oversees residency verification and compliance to ensure that District public schools are accessible to DC residents, and that non-residents

attending public schools in DC pay tuition. OSSE supports local education agencies (LEAs) and schools to verify the residency of students upon enrollment, and conducts an annual audit of enrollment in all District public schools, with a significant focus on residency verification.

In 2017, recognizing that the District needed a stronger focus residency verification, Mayor Bowser and Superintendent Kang set out stronger compliance and enforcement measures which were implemented in the 2017-18 school year. As a result, OSSE stepped up its focus on residency verification during the annual audit of enrollment in District public schools. OSSE accurately anticipated that the increased focus on residency verification would surface more instances of fraud. During the 2017 enrollment audit, OSSE found troubling indications of potential residency fraud at Duke Ellington School for the Arts and made the unprecedented step of confiscating all residency files from the school in order to do further, in-depth investigation. OSSE took this proactive step based on its observation of concerns about the status of the files while on-site at the school, and further input from the OAG. Between October 2017 and April 2018, all files were reviewed, regardless of the initial appearance of the sufficiency of the residency documentation paperwork.

“We will continue to work to ensure that all schools understand proper residency verification procedures, and that District families have the ability to access our city’s schools,” State Superintendent Kang said. “While our goal is to decrease cases of residency fraud altogether, we will also continue to monitor residency, and investigate and address fraud where it occurs.”

Continuing to Strengthen Detection and Address Fraud

OSSE continues to take steps to actively strengthen its ability to detect and address potential residency fraud. OSSE will work with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer’s Central Collections Unit on delinquent payments to ensure that the District collects on tuition owed. To expedite the investigative process at OSSE, the Bowser Administration has added additional staffing resources. OSSE will add two additional full-time investigators to their staff, and the mayor’s fiscal year 2019 budget includes an additional \$300,000 to support residency verification and investigation.

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