



Dear Ellington School Community,

Today, the District of Columbia’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) released a report on its investigation into the residency status of students enrolled at Duke Ellington School of the Arts. While we are still in the process of thoroughly reviewing the report, we want to provide some context and let you know about steps we are taking to make sure Duke Ellington is a trusted steward of DC taxpayer funds.

As a proud DC public high school which benefits greatly from this city’s diversity and dynamism, we are committed to doing everything within our power to ensure full compliance with all governing rules related to DC’s residency requirements and nonresident tuition. We collect and review the prescribed residency verification documentation submitted annually by our students’ parents and guardians. Each year, we also make this documentation available to OSSE during its annual enrollment audit. For the five years immediately preceding this school year, OSSE communicated no material residency concerns.

Recently, there has been growing concern across the city about whether enough was being done to identify residency rule violations at DC public schools. OSSE – which is newly responsible for residency non-compliance investigations at DC public schools– increased its focus on residency enforcement efforts and instituted new policies for auditing school records this school year. Regrettably, OSSE’s recent audit of Duke Ellington’s current student records found that Ellington has fallen victim to significant residency violations by some parents. The audit also indicates a need for greater oversight of the residency documentation process. Duke Ellington has fully cooperated with this investigation.

Residency rule non-compliance is illegal and deprives the DC government of needed revenue. It also deprives deserving District residents of the opportunity to study at award-winning schools like Duke Ellington. We take all accusations of residency violations seriously. Parents or guardians of any enrolled Duke Ellington students who are found not to be bona fide DC residents may not re-enroll their children at Duke Ellington next year unless cleared to do so by District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) under its tuition payment procedures for nonresidents.

Even as the OSSE investigation was proceeding, we took steps to engage the Duke Ellington community and improve our processes. A few weeks ago, our registrar team participated in enhanced training led by DCPS on the enforcement of the DC residency regulations. We also recently met with parents to inform them that next school term we will require residency documents earlier than in previous years to provide additional time to confirm compliance with enhanced OSSE regulations. We also support the campaign that the Mayor’s office has launched to increase public awareness about DC’s student residency fraud prevention hotline.

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*Director of Operations and Collaborative Projects*
- Savannah R. Overton  
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- Vanessa Snyder  
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**Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project (DESAP)**

*DESAP is an independently operated public school in partnership with:*  
D.C. Public Schools  
George Washington University  
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts  
The Ellington Fund

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Finally, long before the OSSE investigation came to light, we made a commitment to DCPS to enhance our recruitment efforts within the District and proposed ways to increase the pipeline of qualified DC applicants.

OSSE's report suggests that more must be done to combat residency rule violations. The Duke Ellington leadership is committed to working closely with the Mayor's office and DCPS leadership to correct any deficiencies and improve the residency verification process.

Duke Ellington's innovative curriculum, outstanding faculty, and newly renovated physical plant have brought it regional, national and international acclaim, including a recent visit by the First Lady of France, Brigitte Macron. We are proud of these accomplishments. But our mission is to nurture and inspire passion for arts and learning in talented students from across the District who might not otherwise have an opportunity to develop their artistic skills. While we accept a limited number of extremely talented, tuition-paying nonresident students, we are committed to enrolling a student body comprised of at least 90% DC residents. This is central to our mission and identity as the only DC public high school to offer a dual curriculum encompassing professional arts training and academic enrichment, in preparation for college and careers in the arts.

I know that you share my pride in our students, faculty and programs, and hope you will join me in making sure we live up to the high expectations that have been set for us. I look forward to more dialogue and the hard work ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tia Powell Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and a long, sweeping underline.

Tia Powell Harris