

Date: November 23, 2020

Case: FY 2022 DCPS Public Budget Hearing



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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

FY 2022 DCPS PUBLIC
BUDGET HEARING

Via Zoom

Monday, November 23, 2020

5:00 p.m.

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 (5:00 p.m.)

3 MS. GASKINS: Good evening. Thank you for
4 joining us this evening for our Fiscal Year 2022
5 Public Budget Hearing for school year 2021 through
6 2022. My name is Sharon Gaskins and I serve as the
7 resource strategy officer for D.C. Public Schools and
8 I'm also joined here tonight by Chancellor Lewis
9 Ferebee and we are excited to be with you tonight.

10 By way of background one of the
11 responsibilities of the Office of Resource Strategy
12 is to oversee and subject budget development for
13 DCPS. This hearing is an important opportunity to
14 hear testimony from parents in the community, so we
15 can hear your priorities.

16 And here's our agenda for this evening.
17 You will begin with an introduction and overview by
18 Chancellor Ferebee followed by public testimony. We
19 will be hearing from community members, parents,
20 organizations and others during this period. We ask
21 if you're not presenting to please turn yourself on
22 mute and turn off your cameras.

1 We will be live-streaming the hearing
2 through our D.C. Public Schools YouTube page at the
3 web address at the bottom of the screen. If you're
4 experiencing challenges connecting this evening,
5 please communicate with the host. For those of you
6 who are on the Zoom, use the chat box, or you may
7 send an email to CO.info@k-12.dc.gov. That's our
8 email address again. CO.info@k-12.dc.gov. And we
9 also have ASL interpretation available as well as
10 Spanish interpretation if needed. So with that I
11 will now turn it over to Chancellor Ferebee.

12 CHANCELLOR FEREBEE: Thank you Sharon. I
13 appreciate that. Good evening everyone. Our goal
14 tonight is to ensure that we continue the dialogue
15 about how we can prioritize our resources to address
16 the needs of each school across DCPS. Tonight you
17 will hear what DCPS is thinking.

18 Tonight we're share our priorities and
19 where we're hoping to lead in the coming years. DCPS
20 will hear what you are thinking per your testimony,
21 testimony from parents and the community members
22 tonight will be shared. Tonight is also the

1 beginning of the dialogue -- not the end.

2 We will continue to engage our community
3 in various ways over the course of the coming weeks
4 and throughout the fiscal year '22 going through the
5 development process to ensure that every voice is
6 heard.

7 As we think about the fiscal year and our
8 budget development, it's always important to ground
9 in our capital commitment. As a reminder DCPS has a
10 five year strategic plan called a capital
11 commitment. In order to make progress to our capital
12 commitment 2022 aspirations, our work needs to focus
13 on our end goals in mind. These goals are about our
14 students being academically on grade level. It aims
15 to ensure that our youngest learners are prepared,
16 and it goes through high school ensuring that are
17 students are ready to go into post-secondary arenas
18 and are prepared to do it well.

19 Students also feel loved, challenged and
20 prepared and also have meaningful experiences. And
21 then with all these things that happened, we
22 ultimately want our schools to improve and families

1 want to choose DCPS. From our conversations tonight
2 with school leaders, families, our teachers, our
3 principals, our advisory boards, as well as feedback
4 from our family surveys and public engagement, we
5 know that there are four areas of focus for this
6 upcoming fiscal year -- fiscal year '22.

7 We know we'll be done with the impact of
8 COVID-19 and the impact it is having on our entire
9 system, as well as to next school year, and we want
10 to be responsive and keep those needs in mind.

11 Those four focus areas are: Responding to the
12 increase in student need.

13 We know that COVID has created a different
14 and unique needs for us and for our families, caring
15 for our staff, listening to community boards and
16 understanding enrollment as we've experienced a
17 slight decrease in enrollment. We do understand that
18 we are in unprecedented time period, experiencing a
19 global pandemic, and it may also have an impact on
20 our planning and our school budget.

21 But tonight we do want to focus our
22 conversation on our school budgets, and there will be

1 plenty of opportunities for you to share feedback and
2 feedback on our reopening plans for term three. For
3 additional questions on reopening, I encourage you
4 all to go to our website at DCPSreopenstrong.com.
5 Now I'll turn it back over to Sharon.

6 MS. GASKINS: Thank you Chancellor. As
7 many of you know over the past year we've been
8 working hard to develop a new school funding model
9 that builds upon the comprehensive staffing model
10 that we currently use to fund schools.

11 Our goal has been to increase the equity
12 and transparency of our system moving forward. We've
13 appreciated the engagement of many of you over the
14 past year. Over the past several months and as the
15 Chancellor just touched on, we've been discussing in
16 depth about how we don't have a complete picture of
17 our needs due to the COVID-19 health crisis, and the
18 education will look a lot different after the
19 pandemic and that our students needs have grown and
20 changed during this unprecedented time.

21 And so as our schools reopen their doors,
22 we know that student's needs need to inform our path

1 moving forward. Given these shifts we want to spend
2 additional time engaging with our educators, school
3 leaders and community members before we move ahead
4 with school budget model solutions designed to
5 increase transparency and equity.

6 For that reason we have determined that we
7 will continue using the comprehensive staffing model
8 for our fiscal year '22 school budgets. This year
9 even though we are maintaining the CSM, we will look
10 for ways to improve principal flexibility while we
11 also continue to deeply plan for rich engagement on a
12 new launch of the new model in fiscal year '23.

13 So we look forward to continuing our
14 dialogue with you and planning and partnership with
15 our communities. And for this year as our budget
16 planning continues, we encourage you to get involved
17 with your school's local school advisory team, or our
18 LSAT.

19 LSAT's are school-based advisory groups
20 made of parents, staff and community members who work
21 with principals on a range of topics, including
22 identifying school priorities and developing the

1 school's budget. If you're interested in more
2 information about your school's LSAT contact your
3 principal, or you'll see the CEO.info email on the
4 screen, where you can also reach out for more
5 information.

6 And for those of you who are new to the
7 LSAT's let me share a little more about them. Our
8 school's LSAT's normally meet monthly throughout the
9 school year to work on a range of topics, not just
10 school budgets, but school culture, student
11 attendance and a range of other important topics for
12 schools.

13 There's a brief update on each school's
14 comprehensive school improvement plan at each
15 meeting. And each year elections for Chairs are held
16 at the end of the school year. Because the LSAT's
17 are comprised of both staff and parents, we ensure
18 that staff are able to elect their peer staff, and
19 parents are able to elect their peer parents.

20 The principal and the school's
21 administrative staff holds the election process with
22 the systems of the DCPS community action team member

1 -- CAP member. Each school should have a functioning
2 LSAT body by the end of the September for the
3 upcoming school year. So for example, that cycle
4 involves elections being held in May and June of a
5 school year, in advance for the upcoming school year
6 in order to be in place by September.

7 And each year during the January and
8 February meetings, the primary topic of discussion is
9 the school budget for the upcoming fiscal year. And
10 to support these conversations, our DCPS community
11 action team and our school finance team host webinars
12 on the budget process as well as the LSAT election
13 process, so I encourage you to just be on the lookout
14 for additional engagement opportunities, budget
15 forums, and community townhalls where we'll want to
16 share with you and engage with you.

17 And so let me share some logistics for
18 tonight. For those of you who we'll hear from, we
19 ask that you please keep your testimony to three
20 minutes. We will keep time and provide a gentle
21 reminder when your time is up. We do this just to
22 ensure that everybody has an opportunity to be heard.

1 Groups should identify one speaker, and
2 that speaker can then testify on behalf of the group.
3 I encourage everybody to speak slowly and clearly
4 because we have a recorder who is recording your
5 testimony for the official record and we want to make
6 sure we get it right.

7 And if you are not testifying tonight, or
8 you have more to say than our three minute allotment
9 allows, just a reminder that there will be many more
10 opportunities to engage and share your own feedback.

11 And a few other notes for those planning
12 to testify. If you're in that role either by someone
13 on the community engagement team, or me personally
14 will announce the speaker list in groups of five. A
15 member of the team will contact you via the chat, so
16 please just monitor that.

17 If when you arrive please message our host
18 in the chat to say that you're present to speak. We
19 want to make sure we're able to bring you on
20 seamlessly. If you are presenting, please keep your
21 cameras off and mic's on mute until you're ready to
22 testify. And then finally, if you haven't done so

1 already, please send your testimony in either a PDF
2 or a Word version document if you haven't done so
3 already to the DCEO.info email on the screen.

4 I'll just emphasize again if you're having
5 any technical difficulties, we're here to help. The
6 email address and the number to call or text are at
7 the bottom of the screen. Great. So with that
8 please hold while I pull up -- hold please while we
9 get the list of the first five presenters.

10 Okay thank you. So our first five
11 presenters is Marion Babcock, Grace Hu, Antawan
12 Holmes, Bernie King and Cedric Hendricks. We'll ask
13 Marion Babcock to please begin.

14 MS. BABCOCK: Good evening Chancellor
15 Ferebee and everyone here tonight. My name is Marion
16 Babcock, and I'm a parent of a current wall student
17 and two wall's alumni. Like all of DCPS magnet
18 schools, School Without Walls has its own unique
19 culture and course offerings, being a rigorous
20 college preparatory program situated on the college
21 -- on the George Washington University Campus,
22 hundreds of highly motivated and curious students

1 from all eight city wards will apply to become global
2 citizens and partners in crafting their own college
3 experience while they attend high school.

4 Whether we are offering a broad array of
5 AP courses, a varied list of electives, or a senior
6 thesis project meant to be defended, our niche is
7 providing the preview of the college experience for
8 which our current and perspective students are
9 preparing.

10 Already School Without Walls is one of the
11 least expensive DCPS students to finance. And last
12 year with 600 students, you underfunded us by
13 \$630,000.00. The steep cut was unfair and
14 inadequate to maintain full employment of our
15 educators, and to keep students fully scheduled.

16 Because of this our parents petitioned you
17 and city council members to minimize the losses so
18 that we can maintain the school students and families
19 expect us to be. In light of last year's drastic
20 underfunding, the ensuing advocacy, the removal of
21 Principal Trogisch, and the problems we face because
22 of educational needs revealed during this pandemic, I

1 request that you approach the budget with these
2 following principals in mind.

3 To be a champion for all students, please
4 call on the mayor to increase spending at the city
5 level, and to increase spending on at-risk students
6 which would go directly to the schools. The second
7 principle -- to set a strong per student minimum at
8 the DCPS level prior to including any funding for
9 at-risk, special ed, or other budget enhancements.

10 Because high school students need more
11 funding and because that DCPS students get 1.22 times
12 the per student amount for high school students, that
13 money should pass through our high schools.

14 Third, to be transparent. At-risk money
15 must be identified and supplement spending. It
16 should be flexible at the school level as called for
17 under city law. Always engage your school leadership
18 in meaningful ways. Trust your principals know their
19 students and family needs, be courageous to become
20 informed by engaging with your LSAT Boards. Thank
21 you for your time and consideration.

22 CHANCELLOR FEREBEE: Thank you. Thank you

1 for choosing DCPS.

2 MS. HU: Miss Gaskin am I waiting for you
3 or can I go and get started?

4 MS. SWANSON: Miss Gaskin said that she's
5 having an issue with her technology, so Miss Hu
6 please go ahead and begin your testimony. Thank you.

7 MS. HU: Okay. Good evening my name is
8 Grace Hu, and I am here today on behalf of Digital
9 Equity and DC Education, a city-wide coalition of
10 parents working to close the digital divide and to
11 provide a 21st Century education for our children.

12 During this pandemic, we understanding
13 your team has been working around the clock to
14 provide technology and other supports to our
15 students, and we appreciate it. We also think
16 there's still work to do, including finding the
17 funding to ensure all our schools have a tech
18 infrastructure to support learning, whether that
19 learning takes place at home or in school.

20 Over the past three months we have
21 collected feedback from our school communities, held
22 interviews on focus groups and conducted a parent

1 survey. Based on these inputs we believe the top
2 needs for digital equity to be the following:

3 Number one -- one to one student device
4 ratio and teacher technology. We still believe that
5 DCPS should be at a one to one student device ratio,
6 whichever school districts in the region and some
7 charter LEA's in DC are supporting this year. We are
8 concerned that if tech planning and procurement does
9 not occur in the next few months, we will not be
10 prepared for the next school year.

11 Additionally, DCPS has not done enough to
12 ensure that teachers have sufficient instructional
13 technology. Many have relied on their personal
14 computers, some of which are not optimal for online
15 instructional demands, either because their school
16 could not afford to buy them a computer, or because
17 the school issued computer was not in good working
18 conditions.

19 Number two -- tech support and asset
20 management. While DCPA started a family call center
21 for tech support issues, we continued to hear that
22 much of the burden for troubleshooting tech problems

1 and managing equipment is still falling on school
2 staff who already have full-time jobs and are not
3 trained in tech support.

4 In additional to general grade level
5 teachers providing tech support, we've heard of
6 staff, which is a school's math interventionist, or
7 assistant principal, having to spend significant time
8 helping families with tech issues. We urge you to
9 provide robust tech support at the school level.

10 Number three -- practical training.
11 Families and teachers have noted the lack of
12 practical high-quality training on everything from
13 basic computer use and email to online platforms.
14 Recorded webinars on Microsoft teams isn't cutting it
15 for many teachers and parents. Those who are not
16 comfortable with technology often needs hands-on real
17 time help.

18 And number four -- internet. We do not
19 think that continuing to spend significant funding
20 for monthly data plans, hot spots, and LTE enabled
21 devices is sustainable. We urge you to work with
22 OPTO on a more long-term internet solution for the

1 city, and we are puzzled that DCPS is not working
2 harder to transition snap and tentative households
3 onto OPTO's Internet for All Program targeting those
4 households, which would reduce the need for some of
5 the hot spots and monthly data plans being paid by
6 DCPS.

7 Until DCPS has a funded, multi-year
8 comprehensive plan that includes all these elements,
9 technology will continue to be funded and managed in
10 an unpredictable, costly and inefficient manner. We
11 encourage you to prioritize creating a tech roadmap
12 for DCPS and look forward to continuing to engage
13 with you on digital equity. Thank you for the
14 opportunity to testify.

15 MS. GASKINS: Thank you so much for your
16 time. We'll hear from our next speaker please.

17 MR. HOLMES: Good evening Chancellor and
18 DCPS executive team. My name is Antawan Holmes, I'm
19 a parent at Houston Elementary School and a Chair for
20 advisory neighborhood 7C. At many of our community
21 meetings throughout Ward 7, parents to continue to
22 express concerns about the following issues:

1 No equitable dual language middle school
2 option located east of the river for Houston
3 Elementary School, lack of comprehensive technology
4 plans to include sustainable PC upgrades, equitable
5 internet access, and best in class technical service,
6 and a lack of a pathway to an equitable
7 post-secondary education from DCPS to a university of
8 District of Columbia located east of the river.

9 As we continue to see an increase in
10 demand for dual language education programs within
11 the District, Ward 7 residents want to ensure that
12 the theater pattern for the Ridgeline Middle School
13 is equitable for our students. The current theater
14 path for Houston Elementary requires students to
15 travel to Wards 2 and 4 to continue their studies
16 because of the District morning traffic, and a lack
17 of dedicated bus school system travel times for
18 parents and students -- usually require 45 minutes or
19 more to arrive on time.

20 This amount of travel over time is a
21 quality of life issue and causes undue burden on
22 families. We recommend that DCPS extend Houston ES,

1 Houston elementary children an education campus to
2 allow dual language students to continue their
3 studies.

4 This pandemic has shown us that DCPS is
5 still not fully funded to enable effective distance
6 learning and prepare our students for transition into
7 the 21st Century information technology careers.

8 Although some gains were made since testifying last
9 year, we continue to see challenges in the following:
10 a lack of comprehensive multi-year DCPS technology
11 plan, stop gap fixes for internet inadequate
12 bandwidth speed to complete daily distance learning.

13 Implementation challenges that hamper
14 adoption. To address these challenges we recommend
15 that DCPS do the following: continue to fund and
16 procure one to one student device ratio for students
17 and teachers and a robust replacement plan to cycle
18 out devices per the industry standards three to five
19 years.

20 Either centralized technical support
21 calls, or decentralized teams and deployment teams,
22 or to hire dedicated local support staff at each

1 school to improve quality or technology support. And
2 then finally, partner with OPTO to create true
3 internet for all solutions such as municipal WIFI,
4 which would be a sustainable city-wide solution for
5 all District residents, especially Ward 7, which
6 would impact the greatest from a digital divide.

7 This District here is not only an
8 international city, but it's one that's most
9 educated. However, access to credit-bearing full
10 secondary opportunity is not located east of the
11 river. DCPS is the main feeder for UDC and we
12 recommend that DCPS continues to closely partner with
13 UDC to increase funding for their enrollment and
14 support UDC funding needed to establish east end
15 campus, at the Deanwood Metro Station near Ron Brown
16 High School.

17 Ward 7, Ward 8 residents work hard to
18 ensure our children are receiving world-class
19 education. We're long overdue for action and we look
20 forward to implementation of our recommendations.

21 Thank you.

22 MS. GASKINS: Thank you Mr. Holmes. We'll

1 hear next from Bernice King.

2 MS. KING: Thank you. Thank you all to
3 all the dignitaries who are on this call listening.
4 The Charles H. Houston community strive to grow and
5 develop student's academic skills, social and
6 emotional skills as well as bi-lingual speech and
7 literacy. With the model of building up life-long
8 leaders, it's critical to have a system that supports
9 academic success as well as ensuring communication
10 with the parents is maintained.

11 School and PTA funding are necessary to
12 promote the welfare of all students at home and
13 within the community. Our goals are to bring the
14 closer the relationships and intersection of the home
15 school parents and teachers in a cooperative effort
16 to intelligently educate our youth.

17 Our PTA respectfully asks for funding to
18 support projects in the areas of staffing needs,
19 leadership development, parent education and child
20 health safety programs. Houston Elementary is
21 continually growing, and as a modernization
22 participant expanding, as we're entering our sixth

1 year as a dual language program.

2 We desperately want to offer our students
3 a complete program. We need an additional
4 administrative support person in the position of an
5 assistant principal. Currently Principal Townsend is
6 managing a school of nearly 300 students without any
7 additional support.

8 Currently we only have one full-time
9 physical education teacher, and the remaining subject
10 -- special subjects are part-time. All students need
11 exposure to art, music, and world language, so we're
12 asking with the addition of two CES classrooms in our
13 building that we have the use of musical instruments
14 that are provided by DCPS, as well as a choral group
15 in the near future.

16 And we know this can be achieved by having
17 a full-time music teacher. Moreover, our scholars
18 have a new library. It would be best to fully
19 utilize these spaces with the presence of a full-time
20 staff person. As we seek to close the achievement
21 gap, we have that full-time librarian and studies
22 show that students with full-time librarian services

1 are able to achieve their educational goals.

2 Lastly, all our students should be able to
3 have that exposure to art, but also have one to one
4 device ratios, continually have software licenses
5 renewed, and tech support to sustain the digital
6 learning. Granted some of these activities will
7 still remain virtual, but if this ever shifts to
8 in-person instruction, funding sources are still
9 required to implement dynamic programming.

10 Moreover, the PTA wants to fund several
11 ideas that we referenced in my written statement, but
12 as Commissioner Holmes already stated as a fellow
13 parent and LSAT member, we need to have funding for
14 our dual language program, and again centralized tech
15 support calls.

16 We'd also like to bring to the attention
17 of the processing on purchasing on a visitor
18 management badging system which will allow us to
19 check all visitors against the school or district
20 databases and provide a more secure means to make
21 sure that a parent and a guardian has signed-in and
22 signed-out of school the proper way.

1 MS. GASKINS: Okay. I believe Miss King
2 has wrapped up her testimony. We will ask Cedric
3 Hendricks to please turn on your mic and camera.
4 We'll hear from you next. Sir you're on mute.

5 MR. HENDRICKS: Sorry about that. Okay
6 sorry about that. I'm in two meetings. In fact the
7 Chancellor knows we're starting our entry community
8 core meeting tonight at six o'clock, and so I'm
9 trying to do this and that all in service of the
10 School Without Walls at Francis Stevens.

11 So let me say Chancellor it's good to see
12 you again. It's been too long. I still want to see
13 you come by our school at some point, but only when
14 it's safe. Now, at our School Without Walls at
15 Francis Stevens, our middle school enrollment has
16 grown over the past few years from 100 students, to
17 approximately 300. And of course the growth as we
18 all know to you Chancellor, and that's why we now
19 have our portable classrooms.

20 But as a result we have a critical need
21 for additional staffing and coaching assistance. And
22 accordingly, we request two additional staff members

1 for coaching assistants. We have a large number of
2 students that need reading interventions, and we
3 really don't have the staff to get them. And you
4 know how critical reading is for student growth.

5 While we have four case managers in our
6 middle school, some of them have as many as 16 cases
7 apiece, and so you know it really doesn't fit within
8 their time to do what's necessary, and so we need
9 additional help. These folks work with families, and
10 they do it both -- and it's just a challenge.

11 And with respect to our -- well I can say
12 we don't need additional staff at this time, we're
13 really at the limit there, so it may be the case that
14 if our enrollment grows when school reopens, we'll be
15 helping that.

16 With respect to early childhood education,
17 we do need some additional coaching support, and
18 while apparently we're getting some support from
19 central office, we understand that that's going to
20 end at some point, and so we'll need coaching support
21 built into the budget.

22 A full-time coach would be ideal for

1 pre-K, but also help out --

2 MS. GASKINS: Mr. Hendricks you're
3 freezing a bit. We will wait to see if you come
4 back. Okay. I believe Mr. Hendricks has
5 transitioned off -- oh, here he is. Hello sir, we
6 lost you for a little bit.

7 MR. HENDRICKS: Okay. Technology. All
8 right well you know, our final appeal was of course
9 focused on our Principal Richard Trogisch, and simply
10 to say that all of his achievements over his years of
11 service deserve reward and not removal. Please
12 reinstate Richard Trogisch. Thank you so much for
13 your time.

14 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your time Mr.
15 Hendricks. With that we will wrap up our first group
16 and I will introduce the next round. Suzanne Wells,
17 Allyson Criner-Brown, Robert Henderson, Nicole Renard
18 and Sandra Moscoso. We'll start first with Suzanne
19 Wells.

20 MS. WELLS: My name is Suzanne Wells, and
21 I am the President of the Ward 6 public schools
22 parent organization. School year 21-22 will

1 undoubtedly be challenging. We trust teachers and
2 students will be back in their classrooms after
3 almost a year or maybe more of online learning.

4 Student will begin next school year with a
5 wide variation in what they learned this school year,
6 and inevitable learning losses. Everyone --
7 administrator, teachers and students, will start
8 school year 21-22 after dealing with an enormous
9 range of experiences. It is highly likely everyone
10 will need more support than ever. In order to make
11 next school year as successful as possible, we urge
12 transparency and collaboration in developing the
13 school year 2022 budget.

14 We also urge that DCPS account for the
15 lessons learned this school year when developing the
16 budget. We learned this morning DCPS plans to
17 continue with the comprehensive staffing model for
18 school year 21-22, while planning for a new budget
19 model for fiscal year 23.

20 We support the decision to continue with
21 the comprehensive staffing model for the school year.
22 Ideally before final decisions are made on a new

1 budget model, schools should be able to see what
2 their school budgets would be under the comprehensive
3 staffing model and under the new model DCPS is
4 considering.

5 Being able to compare the budgets will
6 lead to greater understanding of the different
7 budgeting approaches. Listening to how the different
8 budget approaches impact individual school budgets,
9 and being willing to make changes will lead to
10 greater cooperation and ultimately better budgeting
11 decisions.

12 While we understand next school year's
13 budget is likely to be difficult, we encourage the
14 city to hold school budgets harmless in school year
15 21-22. We are hearing reports that individual
16 school's projected enrollments are being cut for next
17 school year.

18 DCPS has lost the trust of many families
19 during COVID and will need to do relationship
20 building and additional outreach to attract families
21 to enroll. Even if school enrollments decline,
22 schools will need staff stability. When we return to

1 school we will need more -- not fewer, staff
2 available to help students catch up. It will only
3 further exacerbate learning losses if schools have to
4 cut staff.

5 Finally, our organization has long
6 supported digital equity in DC education's work. We
7 request DCPS to continue to work towards a one to one
8 student device ratio, to fund teacher technology, and
9 to provide robust tech support so students and
10 teachers will have the needed tech infrastructure
11 whether they are learning at home or in school.

12 We also support the continued push for a
13 comprehensive funded technology plan, and the
14 sustainable city-wide solution for high speed
15 internet access. Thank you.

16 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
17 testimony. Next I'll ask Allyson Criner-Brown to
18 join us.

19 MS. CRINER-BROWN: Good evening everyone,
20 to the Chancellor and all. Thank you for your
21 providing this opportunity. I'm jotting from notes,
22 so please bear with me. I don't have a written

1 testimony to submit. I'm just going to try to hit
2 these points as quickly as I can.

3 So number one, for next year for FY22,
4 please hold school budgets harmless. What's going on
5 with enrollment right now, the choices that families
6 are making about what they're doing for this year,
7 and what they might do for next year, individual
8 schools cannot be punished for that.

9 If we start doing that,
10 we're going to be on a train where you know, there's
11 so many school budgets that have just been cut and
12 cut and cut over the years, and not only -- sorry,
13 I'm a parent at Beers Elementary in Ward 7, but
14 professionally I've done family engagement as a
15 community partner with DC Public Schools for 10
16 years.

17 And so what I've seen consistently is that
18 every year when the LSAT's meet, it's what do we cut
19 this year? Even if the actual number has gone up,
20 the buying power hasn't gone up. And I think
21 there's a real concern that this may accelerate the
22 decline in investment in our neighborhood schools in

1 particular, and as that continues, people will just
2 continue to not send their children if they schools
3 are not adequately invested in.

4 And one point -- I think there's one
5 question that I really hope everyone at central
6 office is really wrestling with, and the mayor. Do
7 you feel confident that your neighborhood school --
8 this is a question that parents are going to be
9 asking themselves. Do you feel confident that your
10 neighborhood school will have the resources and
11 support it needs to support your child, and every
12 child in the building as well as the staff when we
13 return?

14 Our kids are going through so much right
15 now, and our teachers are as well. And to any
16 teachers listening you know we tips our hats to you.
17 You all are just doing amazing things trying to you
18 know make the best of this situation. And I
19 personally am very, very concerned that we're going
20 to see a mass teacher exodus coming out of this.

21 So we need to e supporting our teachers.
22 We need to be supporting our schools comprehensively.

1 We need to continue to invest in technology. My
2 daughter is in elementary school. We got one of the
3 older laptops and it just created nothing but
4 headache for her until actually a community partner
5 at our school was able to give out other devices that
6 we were not given out by DCPS, and it changed the
7 distance learning experience for us completely
8 because she wasn't frustrated by that she couldn't
9 come off mute.

10 She was wasn't frustrated that she
11 couldn't raise her hand. So continued investments
12 and supports are needed. I put in a help ticket
13 about the laptop, and I called back two weeks later,
14 and they said it was closed, and nobody ever
15 contacted me. So we need continued supports.

16 Chancellor I'm glad to hear you talk about
17 social emotional support and learning. We want to
18 see that in the budget. We want to -- we don't want
19 the words, we want to see the investment in the
20 budget and what those dollars are going to go do,
21 particularly every school.

22 Our schools were not able to fully support

1 a lot already going into this pandemic. The students
2 were struggling. Teachers were struggling in
3 particular areas more than others, so we want to as
4 a community, we want to have the confidence in our
5 schools.

6 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
7 testimony. Thank you so much, thank you for joining
8 us. We'll hear next from Nicole Renard.

9 MS. RENARD: Good evening. My name is
10 Nicole Daley Renard, and I am the President of the
11 PTA at Amidon Bowen Elementary, the neighborhood
12 elementary school for southwest DC. As we know
13 children require diverse learning experiences to
14 thrive. Each spring when we receive the school
15 budget from DCPS central, our school and parent
16 leaders go through weeks of anguish as we consider
17 the prospect of losing staff.

18 As DCPS develops its new budgeting model,
19 we urge DCPS to consider the impact of the model on
20 staff's ability at schools. Next year we will need
21 staff to help students recover from learning loss
22 during the pandemic. This includes not just

1 teachers, but also reading and math interventionists,
2 social workers and other support staff.

3 We cannot afford to lose our best staff
4 due to budget cuts. In fact, schools like ours that
5 serve a large at-risk student population should
6 probably have additional staff to help students
7 catch up and recover from trauma experienced during
8 the pandemic.

9 In the past two years Amidon Bowen has had
10 to make difficult tradeoffs during the budget process
11 that resulted in loss of staff positions including
12 our STEM and Spanish teachers. The lack of staff
13 stability makes Amidon seem like a less desirable
14 option to new families who are comparing our school
15 to those that have the funding to consistently
16 support robust special offerings and other
17 programming.

18 Given reduced school enrollment during the
19 pandemic and the connection between enrollment
20 numbers and school funding, we are concerned that our
21 school and others will be penalized due to
22 circumstances totally out of our control. We urge

1 you to hold schools harmless for enrollment declines
2 that occur during the pandemic.

3 We are a small school of under 350
4 students and our capacity to grow our student
5 population is limited by our physical facilities. We
6 do not have room to open anymore classrooms. Again,
7 our school and students should not be penalized in
8 the budget process due to circumstances outside of
9 our control. DCPS has stated that equity is a core
10 value in its efforts to advance the school budget
11 model.

12 For us, equity does not mean equal
13 treatment for every school and student, it means that
14 all students get the resources they need for academic
15 success. We have yet to see whether DCPS's new
16 school budget is truly equitable and urge DCPS to
17 provide details on the model as soon as possible to
18 school communities.

19 We also urge you to continue the movement
20 towards a one to one student device ratio and to fund
21 computers for teachers. We endorse the
22 recommendations of the digital equity in DC education

1 parent coalition, including the recommendation that
2 DCPS finally develop and fund a comprehensive
3 technology plan. Thank you for the opportunity to
4 testify.

5 MS. GASKINS: Thank you Miss Renard. And
6 next we'd like to hear from Sandra Moscoso.

7 MS. MOSCOSO: Thank you. Good evening
8 Chancellor and DCPS budget team. I am Sandra
9 Moscoso, a parent of two students at School Without
10 Walls High School. I'm here to call upon DCPS to
11 commit to make School Without Walls and every DC
12 public school's budget whole, to act with
13 transparency, and to fully support the needs of the
14 students enrolled.

15 To make our schools' budget whole will
16 require increasing the uniform per student funding
17 formula to the levels in the 2013 adequacy study.
18 Walls has been operating below that level and in
19 2021 we weren't able to continue stretching our
20 budget, and sustained the loss of two positions.

21 The loss would have been greater had we
22 not petitioned for restoring positions that were

1 eliminated in the initial proposed allocation. As a
2 school we worry about how this will play out in
3 2022. While we do not expect any drops in
4 enrollment, I worry about other schools. I join
5 fellow community members in
6 asking for DCPS to hold school budgets harmless in
7 school year 22.

8 And in the unlike and past years, ensure
9 no school loses more than 5 percent of their total
10 budget. After all it is a law. On transparency, I
11 urge DCPS to be clear about the difference between
12 the UPSFF and any funds allocated to meet at-risk
13 special education or other needs.

14 And finally, while it seems obvious to us,
15 DCPS, to fully support the needs of the student
16 enrolled, we have recently learned that DCPS has
17 proposed changing the School Without Walls
18 admission's process. While I support efforts to make
19 the Wall's process more broadly accessible to
20 students across the city, I cannot understand why
21 given the scrutiny this will attract, DCPS is taking
22 this on without a thoughtful process that is

1 inclusive of the very communities it seeks to serve.

2 Admitting students is only the beginning.

3 The hard part is fulfilling the responsibility of
4 meeting the needs of every student in that school. I
5 hope that DCPS is not taking responsibility for
6 admissions and then skirting the responsibility of
7 resourcing the school to meet the needs of the
8 students admitted and enrolled.

9 I hope we will not find ourselves here
10 next year lamenting having failed students as a
11 result of not having made good on resources. I hope
12 that DCPS will correct the inequity of the resources
13 available to students across middle schools, fund
14 every middle school equitably, support every middle
15 school so that educators can support their student
16 body's needs.

17 And so that students can complete and
18 compete and enroll in any of the high schools if they
19 choose. Fund and support every high school so that
20 students have access to the academic, mental health
21 and enrichment opportunities they deserve. And
22 finally, please do not forget the lessons we have

1 learned about digital equity.

2 We do not know how long we will remain in
3 a virtual or hybrid model, devices and internet are
4 our lifeline. Ensure all students and teachers have
5 access this lifeline. Thank you for your time.

6 MS. GASKINS: Thank you. And next we'll
7 hear from Robert Henderson.

8 MR. HENDERSON: Hello and thank you for
9 the opportunity to speak today regarding the DCPS
10 Budget. My name is Robert Henderson. I'm a resident
11 of the Fort Lincoln neighborhood in Ward 5 and a
12 member of the Ward 4 Education Equity Committee.

13 The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into
14 even sharper relief many long-standing inequities
15 rooted in racism and economic injustice, including
16 those in public education. At the broadest level I
17 ask that you put the elimination of such inequities
18 and disparities at the top of your list of guiding
19 principles as you plan the budget for the next school
20 year and beyond.

21 I first want to ask that though a small
22 subset of the overall student population, students

1 with complex disabilities would receive due
2 consideration in our budgeting priorities, including
3 support for additional staff and specialized
4 curricula, and increased community-based options.

5 Secondly, the UPSFF study recently issued
6 by the deputy major of education points again to the
7 need for additional funding targeted for at-risk
8 students, particularly those with multiple at-risk
9 factors as an urgent need. I would ask that every
10 effort be made to ensure that the money allocated for
11 at-risk students be expended directly to support
12 them.

13 Moving forward I encourage DCPS to be
14 receptive to, and responsive to the recommendations
15 of the experts on the UPSFF working group, and
16 elsewhere, pertaining to adjustments in at-risk
17 waits. And I ask for a transparent two-way
18 engagement on potential changes to the DCPS funding
19 model that accounts for input from LEA's, school
20 leaders and teachers.

21 Thirdly, while meeting students and
22 teachers needs for sufficient devices an internet

1 bandwidth is especially crucial for distance
2 learning. A one to one student to device ratio and
3 sufficient internet access is a minimal requirement
4 for a 21st Century education. For that reason, I
5 comment to you the call from Digital Equity and DC
6 Education for a comprehensive DCPS technology plan
7 including devices for every student and teacher, tech
8 support, and digital literacy support, and to push
9 for and collaborate on a city-wide infrastructure to
10 provide adequate internet access to all.

11 And finally in preparation for partial
12 reopening, many DCPS buildings have received needed
13 HVAC repairs and upgrades. I've heard from parents
14 and students -- parents of students in Ward 5
15 schools who have expressed concerns about outdated
16 bathroom facilities that would present challenges for
17 school readiness or not.

18 To the extent that such basic needs could
19 be folded into COVID-related upgrades, school
20 communities will benefit. Thank you again for the
21 opportunity to speak to you today.

22 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your

1 testimony. I'm going to call up some additional
2 people by name. Neo Morake, Qubilah Huddleston,
3 Jessica Sutter, and Cathy Reilly. We'll start with
4 Neo Morake. Is Neo Morake on the call? Okay.
5 Perhaps we can circle back. Can I ask Qubilah
6 Huddleston?

7 MS. HUDDLESTON: Thank you Sharon, hi. I
8 do see Neo on the call, but maybe his audio is messed
9 up. Yeah. So thank you for the opportunity to
10 testify today. My name is Qubilah Huddleston and I'm
11 a policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute.

12 Today I would like to make the following
13 recommendations to the DCPS finance team. First,
14 DCPS should put equity at the forefront of all budget
15 allocation decisions. This includes adhering to the
16 at-risk funding and stabilization funding laws and
17 targeting federal relief dollars to the highest needs
18 schools.

19 Second, DCPS should genuinely engage local
20 school advisory teams to assess needs and develop
21 policy and budget alternatives to student safety and
22 school security in the upcoming school year. All

1 District families are experiencing massive pandemic
2 induced disruptions to their daily lives.

3 The low income DC residents, most of whom
4 are black, Latinx or immigrant are failing worst and
5 will likely be the last to recover. The legacy of
6 racist and classless public policies and practices
7 continues to undermine low income children and
8 children of color's ability to catch up to their
9 wealthier and white peers.

10 The public health crisis has only
11 exacerbated the already unacceptable racial and
12 income gaps and learning outcomes in the district.
13 Now more than ever, DCPS must prioritize equity over
14 equality. DCPS needs to make bold and economically
15 just investments in schools to help ensure children
16 from resource strapped families are not further left
17 behind academically or socially.

18 To ensure fiscal year 22 school budgets
19 are equitable, DCPS should at a minimum, fund schools
20 at their fiscal year 21 level, and ensure that
21 dollars meant to support students already at risk of
22 academic failure supplement not supplant school

1 budgets.

2 To date DCPS has routinely relied on these
3 dollars to cover basic educational services. Instead
4 of allowing schools to use the funds as they were
5 intended to provide additional resources that mostly
6 low income black and brown students need to overcome
7 barriers in and out of the classroom.

8 DCPS should target any future federal
9 pandemic education relief dollars to school-serving
10 students and families most severely harmed by the
11 pandemic. While wealthier mostly white families have
12 been able to work from home, or pay for tutors and
13 other resources to help their children catch up and
14 stay on track, low-income mostly families of color
15 who are essential workers have been economically
16 locked out of these same opportunities.

17 Importantly, as the district aims to
18 reimagine student safety as school security,
19 including reprioritizing moneys spent on security
20 guards, LSAT's and other community oriented
21 stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in the
22 policy and budget process.

1 Black youth and families who are
2 disproportionately harmed by school policing culture,
3 should especially have a say in the development of
4 alternatives in the decision-making process. An
5 example of meaningful engagement at a particular
6 school could look like requesting volunteers or
7 appointing and providing stipends to qualified
8 student's, educators, and other school community
9 members to oversees the evaluation, adoption and
10 implementation, of the final recommendations in the
11 forthcoming report from the DC Commission on Police
12 Reporting.

13 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
14 Thank you.

15 MS. GASKINS: Thank you Qubilah. And next
16 we'll hear from Jessica Sutter.

17 MS. SUTTER: Thank you Chancellor Ferebee
18 and DCPS budget team for the chance to speak this
19 evening. My name is Jessica Sutter and I'm honored
20 to represent Ward 6 on the DC State Board of
21 Education. I'm going to say a lot of things you've
22 heard from others this evening.

1 A year ago I sat before you in Maury
2 Elementary to testify about resource inequity in our
3 schools. I shared my concerns that our neighborhood
4 schools are not an equal opportunity public
5 resource, but rather institutions that mirror broader
6 inequities in the District.

7 The COVID-19 pandemic has brought these
8 inequities into start relief. While all of our
9 students and families struggle with the challenges of
10 life in a pandemic, some families are able to provide
11 access to high-speed internet access, full-time adult
12 supervision for at-home learning, even learning pods
13 to provide children with socialization and enrichment
14 opportunities.

15 Other families are muddling through with
16 inconsistent connectivity, shared devices, guardians
17 working essential jobs outside the home during the
18 school day, and children who've been isolated from
19 their peers for nearly nine months. As DCPS builds
20 its FY22 budget, I hope you will keep three things in
21 mind.

22 One -- build a budget truly designed for

1 equity. The next school year will begin with a mix
2 of students who've lived vastly different lives
3 during this pandemic. It will also likely begin
4 with less money. DCPS must build a budget which
5 prioritizes children who've been most distanced from
6 robust educational opportunities this past year.

7 This will mean allocating significantly
8 more resources to students categorized at-risk, to
9 students with disabilities and to students who are
10 learning English .

11 Two -- the old and equity driven budget
12 that provides flexibility for school leaders to staff
13 buildings in ways that meet the needs of their
14 students. During the pandemic DCPS has been
15 criticized for failing to listen to those closest of
16 problems to inform the solutions.

17 Please begin this FY22 budget season in a
18 posture of listening. Listen to those closest to the
19 needs of the students you serve, empower your school
20 leaders to design school based approaches to meet
21 student needs in their school budgets.

22 And three -- build a budget with a vision

1 for the kind of education every child in DC truly
2 deserves. I hope that the pandemic has forced us to
3 see that many children were not thriving in the
4 schools that shut down in March. All DC children
5 deserve schools with access to well-rounded
6 programming, PE, recess, art, music, world languages,
7 science, social studies, field trips.

8 All students and families deserve access
9 to resources that can meet their social and emotional
10 needs. Schools must have personnel and resources to
11 at a minimum, serve as referral hubs for health,
12 mental health and other critical support services.

13 I'll close the same way I did last year.
14 Can we envision a way to serve every child in each of
15 our schools in ways that are truly equitable? If we
16 fail to see every school and student as worthy of
17 equitable opportunities, if we fail to start our
18 budgeting from an equitable foundation, we will fail
19 our students. Thank you.

20 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
21 testimony. We'll hear next from Cathy Reilly.

22 MS. REILLY: Folks thank you for this

1 opportunity to testify. My name is Cathy Reilly and
2 I'm the Director of SHAPPE, the Senior High Alliance
3 of Parents, Principals and Educators, as well as the
4 facilitator for the Ward 4 Ed Alliance. And both
5 groups are members of C for DC.

6 I strongly support the previous testimony
7 on stability and its importance. It's even more
8 important now. We haven't seen the enrollment
9 projects for next year, but my fear is actually that
10 there will be less than the number of students that
11 we actually need in the fall.

12 We can see it in the kids that have signed
13 up for daycare that will come back. We can see it in
14 high school students that have had the work and not
15 been able to come, so I hope that can be taken into
16 consideration. DCPS came into COVID with school
17 program, work force and enrollment strength. This
18 has taken years to build.

19 The pupil count lost this year will
20 increase unless the message from DCPS is that we will
21 indeed open strong. Reinvestment -- this is the year
22 of transitioning and re-envisioning the school

1 security and safety. I hope that we can start on the
2 planning for that. The effort has been to reallocate
3 the resources that have gone to policing and
4 discipline, to more proactive and supportive
5 initiatives within the schools.

6 This will be more important than ever.
7 Next year we have an opportunity to reset and to
8 start, so schools should see additional funding in
9 their school budgets right now to address this. They
10 should have seen some savings in fact this year. The
11 inclusive engagement process should start now. I
12 hope we can grow DCPS with cooperative planning for
13 next year.

14 I've had positive experiences working with
15 the standing budget committee in years past, and with
16 ongoing feedback and also on the student assignment
17 committee. These goals were difficult, but they
18 built my sense of confidence in a well-run process,
19 and what it can mean for planning and for
20 implementation.

21 I understand you will be starting some of
22 this at the local level with the reopening, and I

1 hope that that will continue and actually expand.
2 Those of us that were working with you on the
3 reopening in October was a complete surprise, so I
4 hope that doesn't happen again.

5 It's not really a matter of more money,
6 that's really a different approach. I strongly
7 support what we've heard about digital equity, and
8 the importance of investing both in the devices and
9 in the internet. You know this year can be looked at
10 as a moment of taking stock and learning. Starting
11 in 2021 on the footing of working more closely with
12 one another, I do believe that's the only way we can
13 be effective, and I believe we can make it happen.
14 Thank you.

15 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
16 testimony. We'll hear next from Neo Morake.

17 MS. MORAKE: Thank you Sharon. Can you
18 hear me?

19 MS. GASKINS: Yes.

20 MS. MORAKE: Perfect. Good evening. My
21 name is Neo Morake and I serve as the community
22 representative on the Amidon Bowen Elementary LSAT.

1 I am a Ward 6 and southwest DC resident, as well as
2 an alum of Amidon Bowen. During the pandemic we've
3 seen community organizations like the Ward 6 mutual
4 aid network, and local churches step up to help
5 southwest DC families in need, including those at the
6 Greenleaf and James Creek Public Housing Complexes.

7 Despite these efforts, we know that when
8 students return to school at our neighborhood
9 elementary school, Amidon Bowen, they will need
10 significant help in catching up, as well as social
11 and emotional support to address trauma and loss
12 experienced during the pandemic.

13 Before the pandemic Amidon Bowen was on an
14 upward trajectory. The addition of a reading
15 specialist and a math intervention coach three years
16 ago contributed significantly to academic gains,
17 measured by both park scores and internal school
18 assessments. Additionally, supplemental
19 instructional staff have become invaluable members of
20 our school community. They know our students across
21 all grades provide unique expertise and they serve
22 our school outside their regular duties.

1 However, these positions are temporary,
2 and every year we must negotiate to keep them. It
3 takes years to recruit, train and incorporate our
4 newest members into the fabric of our school. If
5 the Bowser's administration budget results in
6 staffing cuts to schools like ours, we can lose these
7 staff which could setback progress for years.

8 During our most recent LSAT meeting, I was
9 disheartened to hear that we are already dealing with
10 the setbacks from the pandemic. Among our African
11 American student population only 8 percent of the
12 students tested above level this year, compared to
13 the 24 percent that tested above level only a year
14 ago.

15 The Dahlstrom DIBELS testing also showed
16 that our younger students are behind compared to
17 growth made in prior years. A large factor in this
18 academic loss is a lack of resources in in-person
19 access available to our students. We cannot afford
20 to lose our best staff due to budget cuts. In fact
21 schools like ours that serve a large at-risk student
22 population should have additional staff to help

1 students catch up and recover from learning losses
2 experienced during the pandemic.

3 In addition to continued funding for
4 staff, I urge you to continue the movement towards a
5 one on one student device ratio and to fund computers
6 for teachers. The burden of learning and managing
7 technology procurement should not fall on individual
8 schools that already have a lot on their plate. I
9 endorse the recommendations of the digital equity in
10 DC Education Parent Coalition, including their
11 recommendation that DCPS finally develop and fund a
12 comprehensive technology plan.

13 I know that the city will be facing budget
14 cuts, but the mayor and DCPS have to decide whether
15 to pull the rug from underneath all of their schools,
16 or to support schools so that they can hit the
17 ground running, catching up students who have fallen
18 behind academically while providing needed social,
19 emotional reports. Thank you for your time.

20 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony
21 Neo. And with that I'll turn to our next panel who I
22 will call up right now. Karen Janka, Stefany

1 Thangavelu, Elizabeth Davis, Saylor Silicki and
2 Amber Golden. We'll start first with Karen Janka.

3 MS. JANKA: Good evening. This is Karen
4 Janka. Thank you for the hearing on the community
5 regarding the 2022 budget. I am here to advocate to
6 include school librarians in the 2022 DC public
7 school budget. I have been working as a school
8 librarian for six years. I have served as a term on
9 the DC Library Corp Leadership Council. I'm a DC
10 public schools, I am on the Board of the DC Library
11 Association that supports all librarians in the
12 District of Columbia.

13 More than 60 education and library
14 research studies have provided clear evidence that
15 school library programs with full-time certified
16 school librarians have a positive impact on school
17 achievement. These studies clearly demonstrate that
18 strong library programs help all students to better
19 academically, even when other school variables are
20 considered.

21 Students don't speak English at home, and
22 children in poverty can be among those who benefit

1 the most. School library programs foster critical
2 thinking, providing students with the skills they
3 need to analyze, form and communicate ideas in
4 compelling ways.

5 These are skills that are not consistently
6 included in our current DC public school curriculum.
7 School libraries are places for opportunity. Our
8 maker spaces provide technology skills that are
9 needed for our 21st Century student. To quote adult
10 author Jason Reynolds, "Librarians are the
11 revolutionaries of our environments."

12 Schools with libraries and librarians
13 simply make better schools. I want to demonstrate
14 the impact of one school library by telling about my
15 little library in Shaw. Seaton Elementary is one of
16 the most diverse elementary schools in Washington,
17 D.C. We are a Title I school. My library is no
18 bigger than most classrooms, yet it is the biggest
19 classroom in the building.

20 In 2019 our entire collection consisted of
21 5,423 books, that is fiction and non-fiction, which
22 is about 14 books per student. That's shockingly low

1 compared to the national average of 25 books per
2 student. The school library is the primary place
3 where students get books.

4 In 2019 Seaton circulated 14,492 books, so
5 about 40 books per student. I started talking about
6 the importance of libraries by focusing on book
7 circulation because I think that most people use
8 book circulation as a good measure for success for
9 libraries.

10 It demonstrates at least at my school that
11 students use the school library as their primary way
12 to get books to read outside of classroom texts.
13 This year 24 D.C. public schools are within a
14 professional certified librarian. Of those 24
15 schools, only three have used District provided
16 e-books, and those three schools are far below the
17 District level average. That means 24 schools of
18 students have not -- have been denied access to
19 District reading resources during the year when they
20 are struggling with learning deficits.

21 In the school year 2022 D.C. public
22 schools once again -- thank you.

1 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
2 testimony. We'll hear from Stefany Thangavelu next.

3 MS. THANGAVELU: Yes hello. My name is
4 Stefany Thangavelu and I'm a parent and member of the
5 local school advisory committee at Maury Elementary
6 School. I also engage in support of inclusive
7 education more broadly across the District and
8 globally, which is what has motivated me to speak at
9 today's hearing.

10 I would like to begin by acknowledging
11 that I have the time and resources to be here, which
12 many of our neighbors do not. So often, those who
13 are not represented are those who DCPS and the
14 Council need to hear from the most, but unfortunately
15 they don't have the privilege and access to be heard
16 in a forum such as this.

17 Pertaining to considerations for the DCPS
18 budget, I want to encourage the Council to focus on
19 equity, not equality. Given the diversity of schools
20 and communities across the District, not everyone
21 needs the same thing. We cannot have a cookie cutter
22 approach to school reopening or planning because this

1 will not meet the needs of the school to budget and
2 staff appropriately for those in the classroom.

3 Children with disabilities are in every
4 school and it is critical that plans are nuanced to
5 support their diverse needs. Many of the schools
6 have much more at risk populations and outdated
7 facilities, and thus there should be a much greater
8 investment in school infrastructures and health
9 considerations for these communities.

10 But I do think they are a reflection of
11 our values and a priority, and if DCPS and the
12 Council believes in equity, then there should be
13 clear investments to indicate support for those that
14 need it most. I was disappointed there wasn't
15 support for increases for those with wealth to offset
16 the historic underinvestment in low income
17 communities.

18 I also want to speak about making
19 investments in the future and then doing cost-benefit
20 analysis during planning and construction for DCPS.
21 At Maury Elementary we were told that DCPS would not
22 have the money to include hand washing stations in

1 the cafeteria during our modernization, and this was
2 not in the building specifications. We had to fight
3 for what is a basic hygiene and health standard for
4 reduction of disease infection among children, and
5 thankfully those were included at Maury.

6 However, they might have been if parent
7 advocates had not been so persistent in ensuring DCPS
8 took the necessary longer term mindset pertaining to
9 health and wellbeing of students in our schools.

10 Another quick example is that we were told that DCPS,
11 that the additional cost of \$150.00 per machine to
12 purchase just a water auto-filling station that
13 included an indicator light to replace the water
14 filter, was too much.

15 Well what is the cost of not replacing the
16 filter and having lead in our schools again? Due to
17 this fact that we've cut corners and had open -- we
18 have not had open and transparent investments.

19 Parents have become advocates and must always verify
20 and hold DCPS accountable to deliver on the promise
21 of quality education for all.

22 We must be able to trust DCPS, but

1 currently this is lacking, and I hope that this year
2 we will invest in buying back the community's trust
3 and prioritize equity as we invest in our kids for a
4 better tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to
5 testify today.

6 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony
7 Stefany. And I'll hear next from Elizabeth Davis.

8 MS. DAVIS: Thank you and good evening.
9 I'm Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington
10 Teacher's Union and also a Ward 5 resident. And as a
11 career educator I've learned early on that our
12 students are only limited by the opportunities that
13 we provide them.

14 The budgeting process is full of choices.
15 We recognize that budgets will be tight this coming
16 year, however, we expect DCPS to advocate for the
17 resources that are students need, taking a strong
18 budget request to the mayor asking her to increase
19 the city's per student allocation, and expand at-risk
20 funding.

21 We also expect DCPS to prioritize
22 transparency and be engaged in a local school

1 advisory team as it considers changes to its local
2 school funding model and making decisions about the
3 programmatic funding for the school year '21-'22. We
4 believe our city's FY22 educational budget should
5 number one, ensure that our teachers and students are
6 safe when we reopen schools to in-person learning.

7 Number two, ensure equity and high-quality
8 well-rounded education for all students, provide
9 support for the retention of our teaching force, and
10 at the systems level we encourage DCPS to invest in
11 programs to better support teachers and reduce
12 teacher turnover. We all share the goal of having
13 highly effective teachers in every classroom, however
14 we differ greatly on how we should evaluate teacher
15 performance.

16 We encourage DCPS to remove high stakes
17 testing from teacher evaluations and instead invest
18 in programs to support teacher growth and
19 development. This includes robust research-based
20 professional development. Programs that support
21 student loan forgiveness and tax credits to public
22 servants who live in the communities where they

1 teach.

2 As the WTU look at the FY22 budget at the
3 individual school level, we're looking for
4 investments that are equitable. Investments that
5 will help our city's students recover from the
6 health pandemic, and prioritize closing the
7 opportunity that teachers have that continues to
8 plaque our city.

9 As you begin the development of DC FY 2022
10 budgeting, consider changes to the local school
11 budgeting model, I urge you to keep these priorities
12 in mind. One -- DCPS should establish transparent
13 base funding for the school tied to enrollment and
14 grade level.

15 Number two -- ensure at-risk funding
16 supplements rather than supplant local funding and is
17 flexible at the local school level. Number three --
18 ensure every student receive a well-rounded
19 education. Four -- invest in community schools and
20 enhance social and emotional programming. And five
21 -- ensure a one to one technology ratio for all
22 students, empower LSAT with real decision-making and

1 budget authority.

2 Our public schools should be the great
3 equalizer. Our schools should be a place where
4 students can come and learn. As DCPS considers a
5 financial investment, I hope it will work with the
6 Washington Teacher's Union parents and the community
7 advocates to reform our school accountability
8 measures to de-emphasize the role that standardized
9 testing plays and how we rank our schools and
10 evaluate our teachers.

11 Finally, DCPS needs to reject the concept
12 of school's choice and stand with parents and
13 students in ensuring that every student, regardless of
14 their zip code, or success in the lottery, receives
15 a great education. Thank you for your attention.

16 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
17 testimony. We'll hear next from Saylor Silicki.

18 MS. SILICKI: Hello. My name is Saylor
19 Elouise Silicki. It has been a year now since I last
20 testified for the dyslexia bill and a lot has
21 changed. I'm now going to a school called the Sienna
22 School and it specializes on dyslexic kids like me.

1 I first started the Sienna School halfway through
2 last year and it was really scary.

3 I didn't want to go at all. I thought it
4 was the most stupidest thing ever. But as time went
5 on I realized that going to Sienna was one of the
6 best schools I had ever been to. The teachers are
7 trained to know about dyslexia and some of my
8 teachers even have dyslexia. Now I am okay with
9 going to school and there are subjects that are hard
10 for me, but I still keep trying.

11 I'm now in seventh grade and I would like
12 to become an interior designer when I grow up. Now I
13 know what you're thinking, why is she telling me
14 this? Well I'm telling you this because interior
15 designing involves math. And math is one of my most
16 struggling subjects, and my teachers give us so many
17 strategies and tools to help us to understand math
18 better.

19 I believe one day I will be using a lot of
20 his strategies. For high school I would like to go
21 to Duke Ellington School of Arts to study art, but I
22 have to balance art with learning. So I have to get

1 more strategies so I can pass school and get in.
2 Luckily, my school has a lot of strategies for
3 dyslexic kids that work for me.

4 Every year when I was in DCPS, I was
5 pulled out into a special class. Sort of like a
6 breakout room in Zoom. I was always in with the same
7 people. I would get put into a breakout room to
8 learn reading, writing or math, and it would always
9 be away from my whole class. At first I thought it
10 was cool, but as time went on I realized I was in a
11 different room because of my dyslexia, but no one
12 would use that language.

13 I would always wonder why I couldn't be in
14 the normal class where my teacher could teach me.
15 When I did not feel successful in school, I didn't
16 feel successful out of school. I started missing a
17 lot of school because the anxiety and stress got me
18 sick with fevers and exhaustion. It was hard to see
19 where I fit in and it was hard to cope with my
20 emotions.

21 I felt like the dumbest kid in the class.
22 I always left the room for tests and lessons and I

1 felt left out and lonely. My teachers did not know
2 how to teach a dyslexic kid. Even the teachers who
3 were pulling me out didn't always understand how I
4 learned, and they seemed to go slower, or that I
5 didn't have to do the assignments or tests, or
6 projects at all.

7 I believe that all teachers should go
8 through a dyslexic training, so they know how to help
9 their dyslexic students. Research shows that
10 strategies for dyslexic kids will also help first
11 students who are not dyslexic. When looking at the
12 data from 2019, it is clear that we are not meeting
13 dyslexic students needs, and we must do better.
14 Please fully fund this bill so that every child can
15 feel good about themselves. Thank you.

16 MS. GASKINS: Thank you Saylor for your
17 time and for sharing your experiences with us. We'll
18 hear next from Amber Golden.

19 MS. GOLDEN : Good evening Chancellor
20 Ferebee and to all attending. I am Amber Golden, PTO
21 President at Duke Ellington High School of the Arts,
22 LSAT member and parent of a senior visual arts

1 student. I am testifying about the persistent
2 under-funding of our school by DCPS.

3 My hope is that as we look to a new budget
4 model, we work to rectify this situation. Per pupil
5 funding for all DCPS high schools suggests that Duke
6 is on par with its annual funding, however this does
7 not take into account two things that make Duke very
8 different. One -- Duke is a DCPS acknowledged, dual
9 curriculum school that has a 30 percent longer day
10 with two additional hours every school day than other
11 DCPS high schools.

12 And two -- that added time is part of the
13 instructional day. That includes an entirely
14 different set of teachers not included in
15 traditional staffing model. To cover those arts
16 teaches, Duke gets an annual budget up. It is not
17 the only DCPS high school to get such a budget up,
18 but it is the only DCPS high school expected to fund
19 an entire faculty and extra school hours with it.

20 Duke Ellington is the only school with an
21 intense instruction in the pursuit of the arts.
22 Duke's individual instruction, small group classes

1 and specialty programming and supplies do not fit
2 into the regular funding categories of other DCPS
3 high schools. Such personal lives, career and paired
4 professional instruction is inherently more costly
5 than classes for which Carnegie credits are awarded.

6 As a result, Duke has been descending for
7 years into its current budget situation, which
8 ensures that all its teachers are not only receiving
9 65 cents to every dollar paid to other DCPS
10 teachers, but most have gone years without pay
11 raises, with no hope of getting any in the future.
12 This makes both the retention and hiring difficult.

13 We now know through research that the arts
14 and culture sector provides economic, social, health
15 and well-being and education benefits to society.
16 Research in the U.S. has also demonstrated that arts
17 integration into the curriculum is associated with
18 consistently higher average reading and math scores
19 compared to schools that do not.

20 There is a solution here. DCPS must
21 recognize the unique needs of Duke Ellington. Duke
22 is a world-class arts high school and needs to be

1 recognized and supported as such if it is to
2 continue. Duke is also one of DCPS's best academic
3 schools. It should be noted that Duke does not have
4 academic prerequisites for admission.

5 We also serve students in every ward in
6 the city with 56 percent of our students residing in
7 Wards 5, 6, 7 and 8. So beyond undermining the
8 potential of one of the city's best high schools, we
9 all lose an opportunity to learn from a school model
10 that has closed the academic achievement gap for its
11 black and brown students.

12 Thank you for this opportunity to testify,
13 and we look forward to working with you to resolve
14 this situation. And Saylor, we look forward to
15 welcoming you to the Duke Ellington family.

16 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
17 testimony. And with that I will call out our next
18 panel. Nakisha Winston, Yoshie Nakamura, Nierria
19 Jones-Cooper, Laura Fuchs and Eboni-Rose Thompson.
20 We'll start with Nakisha Winston.

21 MS. WINSTON: Thank you for the
22 opportunity to testify today. My name is Nakisha

1 Winston and I'm a DCPS parent and a Chair of a local
2 school advisory team at Bard High School Early
3 College. On behalf of our LSAT, I would like to
4 thank you for convening this hearing to gather input
5 from the public about the upcoming fiscal year 2022
6 budget.

7 This current school year was a year of
8 change. Teachers had to quickly adjust to virtual
9 platforms to ensure our students could access
10 high-quality instruction of both high school as well
11 as college curriculum. At our most recent LSAT
12 meeting our administrators, teachers and parents
13 brainstormed new and innovative ways for Fiscal Year
14 2022 budget could be used to help students adjust to
15 returning to the physical school building.

16 My testimony today will highlight some of
17 those areas and possible budgetary solutions,
18 expanding Summer Bridge. Typically our Summer Bridge
19 program has been limited to students entering Bard in
20 the ninth grade. At Bard this consists of a
21 week-long learning experience called a writing and
22 thinking workshop.

1 Faculty members from all the disciplines
2 lead sections of students in critical reading and
3 writing exercises to develop their thinking. We
4 believe Summer Bridge should be expanded to all
5 grades this upcoming school year. Entering as well
6 as returning students will need to access social
7 emotional learning focused on rebuilding our
8 community before academic work can resume.

9 These students have not had social
10 interaction in a school setting in a significant
11 period of time. It's unrealistic to think these
12 students would be socially and emotionally available
13 for learning unless we make a concerted effort to
14 ensure we provide them structured ways to reconnect
15 with each other.

16 We strongly believe this required
17 team-building opportunities to assist our students in
18 their adjustment returning to in-person instruction.
19 The Bard community is an intimate intellectual
20 community. Students are expected to be able to work
21 with each other. There are certain foundational
22 skills necessary to listen to ideas that differ from

1 your own.

2 Through Summer Bridge, students learn to
3 present their work to their classmates, as well as
4 provide thoughtful criticism on their classmate's
5 work. Although these skills can be worked on
6 virtually, it takes on a different dynamic when
7 students are face to face with their peers.

8 The 2022 budget should include additional
9 administrative premium to allow all students to
10 participate in a Summer Bridge program to enable each
11 school to rebuild their school communities. Trauma
12 informed return -- the majority of Bard students
13 reside in Wards 7 and 8. Between these two wards
14 there have been at least 5,550 positive tests, and
15 237 lives lost to the Coronavirus.

16 Many students have had to face housing and
17 food insecurity, job loss, as well as an increase in
18 balancing many of their communities. Social
19 distancing may have limited our student's abilities
20 to gather at family and friends to process those
21 losses. In order to support our students, we need to
22 be intentional about providing safe spaces for them

1 to express their feelings.

2 Students need staff that's available to
3 listen to help them process those feelings. The 2020
4 budget should include funds specifically to address
5 the trauma many students faced with the school
6 closures.

7 School security -- we are pleased that
8 DCPS will manage a school security contract. We
9 think it's important that each school community have
10 the opportunity to intervene or select the school
11 security office assigned to their school. It is
12 important to us that school security be considered a
13 part of the school staff because they should be
14 included in all professional development at the
15 school.

16 They should be using the same culture and
17 climate as the rest of the school staff including the
18 story of justice practices, the student's positive
19 behavior innovation in the support. The 2022 budget
20 should include funds for the school's budget to allow
21 them to train school security office and PBIS, so
22 they're fully integrated in the school community.

1 Thank you for convening this hearing.

2 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
3 testimony. And next we'll hear from Yoshie Nakamura.

4 MS. NAKAMURA: Good evening, Chancellor
5 Ferebee and DCPS Team. My name is Yoshie Nakamura,
6 mother of a first grade student in Ross Elementary
7 School, Ward 2, a current PTO vice president and a
8 co-chair of the POT non-diversity committee.

9 I would like to request you to fully fund
10 for the bill E23-150 addressing Dyslexia and Other
11 Reading Difficulties Act of 2020. There was a part
12 IDC Council on November 10, 2020. The bill requires
13 \$272,000.00 for OC in Fiscal Year 2022. My daughter
14 has dyslexia in this graph here. Her needs are
15 multi-sensory step by step instruction.

16 We provide a provide tutor since we moved
17 to District in 2018 that costs us over \$30,000.00 the
18 last two years. We as parents, will spend two hours
19 per day to help with her learning at home after we
20 moved to District in 2018. Yet she's still
21 struggling in reading and writing. There is no
22 question dyslexia screenings, teacher training,

1 appropriate resources, science-based reading
2 instructions like also getting that approach will
3 help dyslexia kids like my daughter in the District.

4 Here is a simple example. My daughter is
5 often late for a virtual classroom class. She reads
6 her clock 10 or 3 like this which the real clock
7 shows 10:30. Her lateness to the 10:30 class which
8 was caused by her learning disability has
9 infrequently put it by the school which gives her a
10 significant stress and anxiety. In fact, she's
11 diagnosed as having this depression as she's
12 surrounded by those who do not understand about
13 dyslexia.

14 She needs a learning space where a teacher
15 understands the dyslexia and its challenges, so that
16 she can maintain her self-confidence and comfortable
17 being herself. Children with dyslexia who are not
18 identified or remediated, have higher rates of drop
19 out, unemployment, anxiety, and depression.

20 Research shows in terms of reading
21 intervention in Kindergarten and first grade is most
22 effective, but also data shows that a majority of

1 D.C.'s students is identified as having a specific
2 learning disability after this optimal age. Even
3 though we provide a great amount of support at home,
4 the amount of dyslexic appropriate interventions at
5 school makes her continue to be a struggled reader
6 and writer.

7 Without having a teacher's understanding
8 of dyslexic strategies, it can harm not only students
9 of learning, but also mental health. Therefore, it
10 is extremely critical to provide dyslexia training
11 for all teachers. Dyslexia is a common learning
12 disability and represents 80 to 90 percent of all
13 those with learning disabilities.

14 Teachers must know warning signs and
15 should accommodate students in various content areas.
16 It is also important to implement science-based
17 reading program, also getting a math approach, and
18 provide all the teachers extensive training for them
19 to teach the program.

20 I truly hope that you fully fund the bill
21 Access to Reading for All, as using Dyslexia and
22 Other Reading Disabilities Act of 2020. Thank you

1 very much.

2 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
3 testimony. We'll hear next from Nierria
4 Jones-Cooper. We can't hear you. No I can't hear
5 you.

6 MS. JONES-COOPER: Can you hear me now?

7 MS. GASKINS: Yep, you're soft but we can
8 hear you. No. How about this Miss Jones-Cooper, we
9 will let you address any audio concerns and circle
10 back. Okay. Because we can't hear you, I
11 apologize. Okay. But we will definitely circle back
12 okay. Next I will call Laura Fuchs.

13 MS. FUCHS: Great. Thank you. So today
14 I'm going to testify solely as myself. COVID-19 has
15 thrown a magnifying lens on the consistent systemic
16 issues that we have come to testify about for a long
17 time. COVID cases have dramatically increased and it
18 is extremely disturbing that classrooms are open, and
19 despite the clear increases in deaths in D.C. as well
20 as new cases that are slated to expand in the coming
21 weeks.

22 We know that there will be a huge

1 Thanksgiving spike in the coming weeks and again
2 after Christmas and New Years and this irresponsible
3 choice makes me fear that DCPS will continue to try
4 and reopen in February, and the long-term health and
5 trust damage that will be done between DCPS and
6 students, teachers, parents and the community will be
7 irredeemable.

8 Just a few minutes ago DCPS teachers got
9 an email that basically said because WTU rightfully
10 filed the PERB complaint against DCPS and won, that
11 we have zero consideration for our families and
12 family members that we live with when considering
13 term three virtual teaching assignments. Shame on
14 DCPS, this is not how you build trust for their
15 teaching staff.

16 You have to be far more inclusive and
17 systemic in how we plan our reopening and the budget,
18 and do more than we ever had under control to discuss
19 the deep-seeded inequities that are still occurring
20 between our students and schools. Yes, trying to get
21 around the duly elected LSAT and SKAG teams by
22 creating another group for your reopening plan is the

1 exact kind of move that removes trust from those of
2 us involved.

3 DCPS has to lower the cost and spending of
4 central office, increase the spending at and by our
5 local public school communities. If you are serious
6 about putting students first, then we need to fix the
7 extreme imbalance between what is spent centrally
8 through DCPS central office and/or at the requirement
9 of DCPS central office versus what our local schools
10 are able to spend in ways that suit their students'
11 needs.

12 DCPS central office is too large and
13 produces too many unfunded mandates that are
14 detrimental to a local school's ability to truly
15 serve their students. Impressively, at the same time
16 DCPS central office provided little to no support on
17 the most important issues, continuing to shut out
18 those who are best suited to help the practitioners,
19 parents and student voices, and insisting that only
20 central office knows what is best.

21 DCPS need to ensure that schools are
22 receiving their full at-risk ELO and special

1 education funds, and not using them to supplant the
2 funds that schools are typically owed based on the
3 comprehensive staffing model. DCPS central office
4 has still not fixed the problems pointed out by the
5 D.C. auditor, and that goes for other targeted funds.

6 This is a violation of local and federal
7 law and must be rectified now more than ever. DCPS
8 should hold schools as harmless as possible for the
9 student enrollment this year. Typically their three
10 year cycle means one bad year on enrollment can lead
11 to several years of budget losses for a school. It
12 should not lead to that kind of loss.

13 Also make sure to follow the DC law that
14 no school's budget should be reduced by more than 5
15 percent to maintain some semblance of stability, or
16 the DCPS must invest even more in our schools that
17 serve a high percentage of at-risk students and work
18 with schools instead of telling schools, to determine
19 how to spend that money in a way that will mitigate
20 any increase among the gaps. Please do not buy some
21 one-size-fits-all massively expensive,
22 non-competitive outside contract with your national

1 education with former friends.

2 Now more than ever, we need to be smart in
3 how we spend our money, not be focused on supporting
4 our professional networks and their resumes. Lastly,
5 digital equity must continue to be support and more
6 quickly worked to more than one student device ratio.
7 Now that my students do have far more access to
8 technology, I can see how much I've been missing out
9 on my extremely limited access before the pandemic.
10 Thank you.

11 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
12 testimony. We will hear next from Eboni-Rose
13 Thompson and then we will circle back to Nierria
14 Jones-Cooper.

15 MS. THOMPSON: Good evening Chancellor
16 Ferebee and DCPS community. My name is Eboni-Rose
17 Thompson and I'm here in my role as the Chairman of
18 the Ward 7 Education Council.. I first want to
19 remind us all that any budget is a moral document.
20 It's a statement of our priorities. It tells us
21 mathematically in dollars and cents what areas,
22 issues, things and people are most important to the

1 creators of that budget, and which are least
2 important.

3 This is the first budget we are creating
4 together with the full knowledge that we are in a
5 pandemic. We should expect to spend more than we are
6 used to because our need is greater than ever before.
7 DCPS has stated equity as a core value. We need to
8 see those equitable dollars in the budget now more
9 than ever.

10 Yes, we've seen slight decreases in
11 enrollment this year. Yes, the city's booming
12 revenue of the last few years is slowing and yes,
13 that means many of our city leaders will try and
14 persuade us and prepare us for cuts. And yes, that
15 is the opposite of what we need to do right now to
16 make sure students, schools and parents have what
17 they need during this unprecedented time.

18 Whenever kids are back in person, schools
19 have to spend big on things like facilities, updates,
20 PPE and facility cleaning. As long as we remain
21 online only, we're buying extra laptops and internet
22 hotspots. As long as DCPS is attempting to do both,

1 it's a double whammy of new costs and that is before
2 we even get to recovery when we are more readily able
3 to address the likely lost months of learning.

4 We need to spend a lot -- we will need to
5 spend a lot to catch them up, potentially hiring more
6 teachers and tutors, shrinking class sizes, maybe
7 even extending the school year and that's just
8 academics. This pandemic has also set kids back
9 socially and emotionally.

10 Eight months into this pandemic we can no
11 longer say, or at least it's not sufficient to say,
12 we couldn't have seen this pandemic coming. We now
13 must focus all of our energy into making sure schools
14 and families have the necessary resources to see our
15 way through and out of this pandemic.

16 As we begin the budget dialogue for this
17 year, we need to know the voices of DCPS will be with
18 us and asking for every dollar that is needed in the
19 mayor's proposed budget. Last year to many of us
20 who went before the Council advocating for digital
21 equity, and were told by Council members they would
22 not invest 11 million for devices unless the

1 Chancellor asked.

2 We need you to ask. We need you to be
3 with us. We need a moral budget that prioritizes the
4 following things. DCPS holds harmless for this
5 enrollment this year, a hearing both to the
6 comprehensive school staffing model and the current
7 school stabilization lost in place, increasing the
8 at-risk rate, excuse me at-risk wait, digital equity,
9 including a comprehensive technology plan and
10 collaboration with OPTO, working towards public Wi-Fi
11 that is successful city-wide, school-based mental
12 health services in collaboration with the Department
13 of Behavioral Health, and finally home visiting with
14 increases to the CFSA budget.

15 We hope that DCPS will be with us as we
16 work with you every year, and we hope that you ask
17 for the dollars you need to make sure our schools and
18 our students can be successful, thank you.

19 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
20 testimony. And we'll hear next from Nierria
21 Jones-Cooper. I'm afraid we can't hear you. Okay.
22 Miss Jones-Cooper might have jumped off.

1 MS. JONES-COOPER: No I'm here. Can you
2 hear me?

3 MS. GASKINS: Sure can.

4 MS. JONES-COOPER: I had tried to turn the
5 video, I thought I could turn the video on, but
6 that's what I was trying to do but it wasn't working.
7 So.

8 MS. GASKINS: Okay. Feel free to proceed.

9 MS. JONES-COOPER: Good evening. My name
10 is Nierria Jones-Cooper and I'm the outside Co-chair
11 and parent of a freshman scholar at Phelps ACE High
12 School. First let me start by saying thank you for
13 giving me the time to speak today. In addition, I
14 want to thank DCPS for its efforts in ensuring that
15 our children are receiving quality education during
16 these never before seen times.

17 Before I talk about Phelps, I want to talk
18 about my son. My son was diagnosed with autism when
19 he was three. He lived in Georgia at that time. I
20 researched school districts across the country and
21 D.C. is where I felt he could excel. I wanted my son
22 to be a DCPS graduate.

1 My son has always felt bored and not
2 interested in school, but I saw something change in
3 him when we first visited Phelps open house. He saw
4 the HVAC machines and the construction room, and for
5 the first time I saw my son interested in his
6 education. For him, he had found his people.

7 Now I want to talk about three words and
8 put them into context. The first word I want to talk
9 about is uniqueness. I've never seen a school like
10 Phelps. For someone like my son, the hands-on
11 experience is crucial. During Phelps' open house, he
12 couldn't help but touch the projects he saw, and
13 there was one that wasn't working right.

14 Usually teachers would advise scholars not
15 to touch things, but that's not what happened. The
16 teacher leaned in and asked my son what did he think
17 was wrong with the project, and then what would he
18 recommend to fix it. And that focus to push
19 scholar's creativity and ingenuity did not wither
20 away simply because of virtual learning.

21 On the second day of school he had what I
22 like to call a MacGyver project. I've never seen a

1 place encourage and foster open minds the way Phelps
2 has. It truly is a unique place. The next word I
3 want to talk about are options or is options.
4 Scholars have felt not only taking courses to get
5 them college ready, but Phelps also allows an
6 opportunity for scholars to go from high school
7 straight into a career -- notice I didn't say job.

8 One of my biggest fears as a parent of a
9 child on the spectrum is what is going to happen to
10 my son when he becomes an adult. Executive
11 functioning skills are always a struggle. On back to
12 school night adopted in the emphasize options. At
13 that moment I too realized that my son had found his
14 home. Those options are crucial.

15 Careers in construction and tech industry
16 are real options for scholars right out of high
17 school, as well as opportunities for
18 entrepreneurship because we all know that college is
19 not for everyone.

20 The last word I want to talk about is
21 equity and how equity connects uniqueness and
22 options. In past years Phelps has struggled in terms

1 of its budget. In previous years, through
2 stabilization funds and other gap funds that were
3 provided by DCPS, Phelps has been able to offset some
4 cutbacks, but has had to limit what it can provide
5 scholars.

6 Because of Phelps uniqueness, the upkeep
7 to ensure the quality of materials and machines used
8 to teach scholars is far more expensive than most
9 DCPS high schools. So while we have received
10 additional funds, we were still forced to cut
11 psychologists, ESL teachers, and now this position is
12 half time. In previous years, the welding and
13 plumbing programs are cut completely.

14 So in closing as the Board considers this
15 budget, we ask that you consider the uniqueness of a
16 school like Phelps and create an equitable budget
17 that will allow Phelps to continue to strive towards
18 excellence, and provide options for scholars so that
19 they can continue to become successful adults.

20 We know that enrollment numbers have been
21 shaky over the years, but Phelps has been making
22 efforts to climb. This past school year we exceeded

1 our enrollment budgets, and we are on the path to
2 have a strong increasing enrollment for school year
3 2021. Thank you.

4 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
5 testimony. Okay and the next panel I will call
6 includes Elizabeth Mitchell, Laura Segal, Stanley
7 Keen, Katy Button and Tonia Bain. So we'll start
8 with Elizabeth Mitchell.

9 MS. MITCHELL: Thank you. My name is
10 Elizabeth Mitchell and I'm a parent of two students
11 at Janney Elementary as well as the PTA Co-President.
12 We really don't know much about next year yet. We
13 don't even know what the next few months or weeks
14 look like.

15 We are hopeful that there will be a
16 vaccine soon, but we don't know what the timing will
17 be, or how it will be distributed. We are hopeful
18 that our COVID numbers will go down and we can return
19 to in-person learning, but without meaningful actions
20 from our Mayor and Council that seems like a far off
21 dream.

22 We have no idea what our fall enrollment

1 numbers will be, but we do know that the number of
2 student in our virtual classrooms is dropping as
3 parents pursue other programs, and students struggle
4 to keep up in isolation and amidst the collective
5 stress of the pandemic.

6 We know that parents, caregivers, teachers
7 and staff and communities are doing the best they can
8 to deal with the pandemic, while caring for each
9 other and trying to keep our students from falling
10 too far behind. We know that everyone is struggling
11 right now and that are teachers are being asked to do
12 so much more than is typical.

13 We know that as our numbers surge, and
14 communities continue to grapple with the effects of
15 the pandemic, there will be long-term impacts that we
16 are only just beginning to understand. What does
17 this mean for DCPS in our schools? We know we are
18 going to need more teachers and support staff to help
19 students with literacy issues.

20 DCPS has already identified this issue,
21 but I haven't heard a single workable plan to address
22 it yet. It is abundantly clear that we need extra

1 teachers, tutors and staff to help tackle this
2 mounting problem. We need to invest now, so that we
3 can hire background check, and train the staff we
4 need in the fall and beyond. I implore DCPS to work
5 with principals in schools to find out what they're
6 going to need going forward.

7 Those closest to the problem are closest
8 to the solution. We are not a huge school system,
9 and our schools are incredibly diverse. As we're
10 seeing with the reopening plan, there's no one
11 solution that fits all of our schools. Working with
12 the stakeholders in each school community to find out
13 what their top issues are now, and how we can budget
14 and plan to help them I the future.

15 The demand for mental health services and
16 supports has never been so urgent or essential.
17 Students, families and teachers are all suffering so
18 much loss. COVID has taken away jobs, freedom and
19 our ability to gather and commune with each other,
20 but worse still it's also taken away so many of our
21 loved ones.

22 We will be grappling with these losses for

1 the rest of our lives, but right now so many of our
2 students are suffering from depression, anxiety and
3 other mental illness. This is already a huge burden
4 for our schools and teachers, so let's support them
5 by hiring the staff they need and help provide
6 support, services and screening.

7 If we lean in now and plan for the future,
8 we can prevent the trauma the pandemic is inflicting
9 on our most vulnerable, thank you.

10 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
11 testimony. We will hear next from Laura Segal.

12 MS. SEGAL: Hi. Thank you for the
13 opportunity to testify today. I have boy/girl twins
14 who started at Key Elementary School as
15 pre-Kindergarteners or pre-K students. And my
16 husband is a DCPS alumni as well. I know that this
17 year is filled with a lot of competing priorities and
18 intense unprecedented situations, but I'd like to
19 talk today about the persistent problem of the
20 reading divide and the dyslexia programs that have
21 been proposed, but have not yet been funded.

22 My son Johnnie could be the poster kid for

1 the benefit of these programs. In pre-K and
2 Kindergarten, we and his teachers kept waiting for
3 his reading to click. We waited and waited. And
4 everyone said it will connect, it will just happen.
5 We kept receiving assessments through first and
6 second grade, "It's on the cusp, it's going to happen
7 any time now."

8 But it turned out it didn't. He had
9 dyslexia and needed to learn to read differently and
10 different types of instruction to be successful. He
11 did receive a lot of different supports, but they
12 weren't effective or appropriate for his needs.
13 Since the school never did an assessment despite
14 requests, we went and got a private assessment, and
15 we took that back to secure an IEP at the school.

16 In third grade he received some services
17 and supports, but they weren't adequate. But they
18 said, "He was kind of on grade level," and what we
19 found out later when we got back from private
20 testing when it just didn't feel right, was his
21 fluency was still at 16 percent, but his
22 comprehension was at 99 percent, and they were

1 averaging, and that's how they look at these programs
2 during the IEP.

3 So at one-sixth, 16 percent they were
4 saying he was on grade level, when in fact he was
5 four standard deviations below his ability. Over
6 that summer we signed him up for an intensive
7 program at Lindamood-Bell at a cost of \$15,000.00.
8 Within five weeks his fluency jumped to 66, 6-6
9 percent from one-sixth, 60 into 66. So to underscore
10 that at five years at Key School 16 percent, five
11 weeks at Lindamood-Bell, with the right kind of
12 instruction, multi-sensory instruction and
13 engagement, he was able to jump to 66 percent.

14 I just am baffled by how many other
15 students must be in this kind of situation within the
16 school system when one in five students, or one in
17 ten have dyslexia, and it's often only found or
18 diagnosed in schools of higher income, or within
19 white families and people that pursue private
20 testing.

21 And you think of the reading divide in the
22 city and in hindsight it's just beyond frustrating to

1 know that the knowledge and ability to screen kids
2 really pretty easily, the same way you do for vision
3 and hearing. And that we know from brainstorming how
4 to address these problems, but the schools in D.C.
5 are not providing it to the students.

6 We need to acknowledge all of these
7 children and bright and capable, but they need a
8 chance. They just need to learn to read differently
9 than they're being taught. Now is the chance to make
10 that difference by funding the screening services and
11 supports for the dyslexia program and addressing the
12 reading gap for real. Thank you.

13 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
14 testimony. We'll hear next from Stanley Keen.

15 MR. KEEN: Hi. I'm Stan Keen. I
16 recognize that I'm a man of privilege and one of my
17 privileges is the ability to even find time to be
18 here with you tonight, and I'm privileged to be here
19 with you tonight. I am privileged to have been a
20 federal employee for about 30 years and to be married
21 to my husband for about the same amount of time and
22 that we have two amazing daughters. I'm proud to be

1 a new citizen of the District, having moved up here
2 in the past year from Georgia, like Miss Jones-Cooper
3 whose testimony touched me tonight.

4 And I'm proud that my daughters are
5 following in my footsteps in a public school system,
6 specifically at Walls High School. I'm here to use
7 the privileges that I have to advocate for those who
8 may not be here tonight, or cannot be here tonight.
9 I urge you to pay close attention to the testimony
10 that you've heard so far about equity, equality,
11 technology, transparency and the effects of the
12 pandemic.

13 The testimony has been strong and
14 consistent. I urge the city to continue advocating
15 for increased spending on education, to increase the
16 opportunities for all the children throughout the
17 District. I urge the city to continue advocating for
18 increased spending for at-risk and special needs
19 students, that those special funds should go directly
20 to the schools that need them.

21 I urge the school system to set a strong
22 well-defined per student minimum of spending. I urge

1 that those student minimums carry through high
2 school. I urge the school system to clearly and
3 transparently authorize supplemental findings for
4 at-risk and special needs students, not to bury those
5 costs in general funding, and to allow the students
6 the flexibility to use them creatively and
7 appropriately for their school.

8 At Walls specifically, I understand that
9 it has been underfunded in the past few years. As a
10 government employee, I know that employees and
11 teachers will strive to do an amazing job as they
12 suffer inadequate funds. We can endure that for a
13 while, but eventually the work suffers. Therefore I
14 urge you to look closely at the funding that you have
15 provided at Walls.

16 I understand that it is tempting to
17 question the propriety of target schools, but I
18 believe the target high schools are important to the
19 entire school system to support all students who have
20 specific interests and goals, whether that be
21 academic, sciences, languages or the arts, or which
22 students like Saylor Silicki, whose testimony touched

1 me earlier.

2 For this reason I encourage you to pay
3 special attention to helping middle schools
4 throughout the district lift their students so they
5 can qualify on equal footing for target high schools
6 if they want. And I urge you to use the pandemic not
7 only as a challenge, but as a learning experience and
8 learn the importance to our education of equitable
9 funding for technology. Thank you.

10 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
11 testimony. We'll hear next from Katy Button.

12 MS. BUTTON: Hi thanks. I'm the parent of
13 an eight grader at Deal Middle School. I'm
14 testifying in support of the addressing Dyslexia and
15 Other Reading Difficulties Act of 2020. As you know
16 its been passed by the city council, but does still
17 require funding every year from DCPS.

18 This year, although the funding from DCPS
19 is zero dollars, -- does require \$272,000.00 to fund
20 the first year of the bill. My daughter is like many
21 of the families you've heard from today already,
22 suffers from dyslexia. She was diagnosed very late

1 and beyond the window for any kind of full
2 remediation. And like many of the families that you
3 have heard from and will hear from we fought the
4 special education team at my daughter's elementary
5 school, Janney Elementary, for years trying to get
6 her proper diagnosis and treatment.

7 It was clear as early as Kindergarten that
8 she had reading difficulties, but her teachers,
9 including the reading specialist that were treating
10 her, were not trained to recognize this very common
11 reading disability. Finally in fifth grade, I took
12 the testing that Janney had done and took it to an
13 outside specialist. I didn't even need to pay for
14 outside testing, I took the testing and the
15 specialist said this kid obviously has a reading
16 disability. Why are they saying she has ADD?

17 And then I learned that five other
18 children in her grade alone at Janney were diagnosed
19 as having ADD when they were all in fact moderately
20 to severely dyslexic. These children have all
21 suffered from varying kinds of stress, anxiety and
22 mental illness because of being misdiagnosed, and

1 being called careless readers and sloppy spellers,
2 even though again as early as Kindergarten it was
3 obvious these kids had a diagnosable reading
4 disability.

5 Again, finally in fifth grade I was able
6 to get Ruthie diagnosed, and get her -- we ended up
7 reaching a settlement with DCPS because they had
8 clearly misdiagnosed her, and she's getting outside
9 treatment at The Lab School which has helped her
10 tremendously, but DCPS does not want to continue
11 providing her with those services.

12 When you look at how many students DCPS is
13 paying for either comp ed, or private placement, it's
14 millions of dollars, and so you might look at the
15 cost of this bill in the next several years as
16 substantial, but in fact it will save DCPS millions,
17 tens of millions of dollars if you could diagnose
18 kids early and provide them treatment.

19 My daughter's Kindergarten teacher, again
20 called her a sloppy speller and a careless reader.
21 Her first grade teacher said just look at the
22 pictures and let that help you understand what the

1 words say. These teachers have clearly never been
2 introduced to the science of reading, and that
3 transferred also to the special ed teachers that she
4 was seeing.

5 I really hope that DCPS can implement this
6 bill properly, that the Council passed unanimously,
7 and clearly wants to see the students in D.C. public
8 schools receiving appropriate intervention and
9 testing at early grades, and the teachers need to be
10 trained to do this. Thank you.

11 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
12 testimony. We'll hear next from Tonia Bain. You're
13 on mute.

14 MS. BAIN: Sorry about that. Good evening
15 and thank you for the opportunity to testify this
16 evening. My name is Tonia Bain, and I am the parent
17 of a fourth grade student at Ludlow-Taylor
18 Elementary School. It is heartbreaking to see your
19 child who has so much promise and potential struggle
20 to read.

21 It's heartbreaking when you're child who
22 loves to be read books about Mars, who thinks about

1 where the universe ends, who teaches you about viral
2 stages, tells you that he hates science because he
3 struggles to read hand-outs, or to write in class.
4 My nine year old son was diagnosed with dyslexia a
5 year and a half ago, just before he started third
6 grade, but the truth is he had showed classic signs
7 of dyslexia long before then.

8 He had trouble learning to write letters
9 and their sounds in pre-K 4, in Kindergarten he was
10 slow to learn to decode simple CVC words like cat, or
11 sat. In first grade his handwriting was illegible,
12 and he struggles to this day to capture all of the
13 sounds of the words when he's spelling.

14 His teachers have been by and large
15 attentive, smart and dedicated, but they weren't able
16 to identify these difficulties as possible signs of
17 dyslexia, and more importantly they didn't have the
18 tools or the training they needed to address his
19 phonetic make awareness deficits.

20 In fact, most teachers, even special
21 education teachers, are provided little to no
22 instruction in their teacher preparation programs on

1 identifying and supporting dyslexic students, and
2 this has done real harm to students. Research shows
3 that intensive reading intervention in kindergarten
4 and first grade is most effective in helping
5 struggling readers.

6 The longer you wait to do proper
7 interventions, ones that are based on the science of
8 reading, and we know so much about that now, the more
9 time you have to spend for an intervention to be
10 successful. This means that kids like my son are
11 either falling farther behind, or missing out on some
12 of the most interesting parts of the curriculum as
13 they fight to catch up on basic reading skills.

14 Children who aren't identified, or who
15 don't receive the right types of intervention are at
16 a higher risk for dropping out, for unemployment, for
17 anxiety and for depression. In some ways, we my
18 family, has been really lucky because we can pay for
19 outside support and we have spent thousands of
20 dollars on that.

21 And more importantly, we built a great
22 partnership with his special education teacher, who

1 after my son's diagnosis has invested her time and
2 effort in building her expertise around this issue.
3 But not every family has the means to pay for tutors,
4 and not every school is investing in training for
5 their teachers.

6 Reading difficulties are not rare. In
7 2019 only 30 percent of D.C. fourth grade students
8 were at or above proficient reading level, and
9 dyslexia is not rare. In fact, an estimated 80 to 90
10 percent of students with learning disabilities are
11 dyslexic, but all of them like my son, are full of
12 promise and potential and we should not fail them.

13 For all of these, and so many other
14 reasons my family is asking DCPS to fully support
15 funding for the addressing Dyslexia and Other Reading
16 Difficulties Act of 2020. Thank you.

17 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
18 testimony. Okay great. With that I will turn to our
19 next panel which I'll call now. Sarah Spreitzer,
20 Jennifer Hausfeld, Christina Robbins, Claire Sontag
21 and Tilman Wuerschmidt. I'm sorry if I got any of
22 those names wrong. So we'll start first with Sarah

1 Spreitzer.

2 MS. SPREITZER: Thank you. Hello, my name
3 is Sarah Spreitzer, and I am a resident of Ward 4,
4 and the mother of two DCPS students. I am testifying
5 on behalf of my daughter Leila, and as a member of
6 the Decoding Dyslexia group. I am a long-time
7 resident of D.C. and my husband I are committed to
8 raising our children in the city.

9 We are also committed to the D.C. public
10 school system. I come before you today to ask DCPS
11 to support and implement the programs established by
12 the addressing Dyslexia and Other Reading
13 Difficulties Act of 2020. In supporting these
14 programs I ask that DCPS make a permanent commitment
15 to address these students with dyslexia and other
16 reading difficulties in our schools.

17 My daughter Leila is eight years old and a
18 third grader at Lafayette Elementary School. Overall
19 DCPS has been a very good experience for our family.
20 However, about three years ago my daughter started
21 demonstrating issues with learning how to read. For
22 our older son, reading came naturally. He moved

1 easily from board books to learning the alphabet, to
2 reading level A to Z. Our daughter Leila, however,
3 is a different story.

4 Leila should have been screened for
5 dyslexia in Kindergarten, but wasn't. We knew
6 something was off when she didn't progress as
7 smoothly as her brother, but we were told by the
8 teachers to wait and see. When she entered first
9 grade she scored very low on the Dibels. The test
10 scores indicated that she needed the most support
11 for help with reading, and she wasn't even on the
12 most basic reading level because she didn't know her
13 alphabet.

14 She scored incredibly low on phonemic
15 awareness and phonics, with scores slightly higher on
16 reading comprehension because she had learned to fake
17 her way through figuring out the text. This allowed
18 DCPS to say that she was at grade level. The school
19 continued to pull her out of class for additional
20 support, but none of that seemed to help, and only
21 served to frustrate Leila more because it wasn't the
22 specialized instruction she really needed.

1 Finally, her first grade teacher told us
2 that she suspected something else was going on since
3 Leila could learn and so desperately wanted to learn,
4 but for some reason had a type of roadblock. But the
5 teacher didn't have a name for it, or really any
6 sense of where we should start addressing it. We
7 asked the school for an assessment and they only
8 assessed her in the two areas -- reading
9 comprehension and an IQ test. Neither of which were
10 her areas of suspected disability.

11 Because of that we sought an outside
12 evaluation by a developmental psychiatrist and
13 finally we had our answer. Leila was dyslexic. This
14 process took us over a year and cost us untold hours
15 and dollars, as well as creating stress for our
16 entire family. And we still had to battle to get
17 DCPS to accept the diagnosis and make Leila eligible
18 for in-school specialized instruction.

19 We are extremely lucky that we had the
20 ability to spend the additional dollars and time to
21 support her. While Leila was diagnosed early, that
22 is not the norm. The addressing Dyslexia and Other

1 Reading Difficulties Act of 2020 requires programs
2 and changes that would address some of the most
3 problematic issues that our family had to deal with
4 including universal screening and professional
5 development for K to 2 teachers, awareness training
6 for all teachers on dyslexia.

7 I urge DCPS to support these important
8 programs and provisions, and urge the mayor to sign
9 it into law. Thank you so much.

10 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
11 testimony. And now we will hear from Jennifer
12 Hausfeld.

13 MS. HOUSFELD: Thank you to DCPS for the
14 opportunity to speak this evening. I'm Jen Hausfeld
15 and I'm a DCPS parent, a former DCPS teacher and I'm
16 part of the D.C. Chapter of Decoding Dyslexia, a
17 grassroots group of parents and educators.

18 The D.C. Council passed 323150 addressing
19 Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties Act of 2020
20 this year. I asked that DCPS support full funding
21 for this bill, a permanent city-wide commitment to
22 struggling readers and those with dyslexia, the most

1 pervasive learning disability.

2 I appreciate that DCPS held a dyslexia
3 training for some teachers last June, as many
4 teachers don't know what dyslexia is and what running
5 -- are. That's identification and intervention for
6 these students is delayed and those students are
7 clearly failing. We know that 75 percent of children
8 who's reading help is delayed to age 9 or later
9 continue to struggle throughout their school career.

10 The reading intervention that begins in
11 third grade is less successful and less
12 cost-effective than interventions that begin in
13 earlier grades. In D.C. we are not identifying
14 children early enough. In 2016 out nearly 4,000
15 identified with specific learning disability, only 18
16 were age 6, compared to 320 at age 9, they're
17 identifying these children too late, making the
18 mediation more difficult and exorbitantly more
19 expensive.

20 In FY22 please continue more intensive
21 training on interpreting Dibels' scores and its
22 connection to dyslexia and reading difficulty, so

1 struggling readers are identified early. Not all
2 teacher recognize Dibels as a tool to screen for
3 dyslexia. Expand upon and continue dyslexia training
4 and the science of reading training that were held
5 last June and in addition to K-2 teachers, require it
6 for reading specialists and reading education and
7 special education teachers.

8 The best intervention is high quality
9 initial instruction, but in many classrooms
10 struggling readers are still taught to use picture
11 clues to guess at words, not the type of explicit and
12 systematic instructions struggling readers with
13 dyslexia need to learn how to read.

14 While DCPS has science-based reading
15 programs such as foundations and phonemic awareness,
16 not all schools use them, and not all teachers have
17 extensive training in them. In FY22 please fund
18 training and coaching for high-quality science-based
19 reading programs that DCPS already has, so we are
20 ensuring they reach students effectively, or we will
21 never make a real impact.

22 Children with reading difficulty, such as

1 dyslexia, who aren't identified or remediated, have
2 higher rates of drop out, unemployment, anxiety and
3 depression. A 2000 study estimates that 50 percent
4 of prison inmates have dyslexia. The percentage of
5 students who experience reading failure, and the deep
6 academic and emotional consequences due to that
7 failure can be tremendously reduced.

8 All children in the District of Columbia
9 deserve an equitable education and that includes
10 dyslexics and struggling readers. Thank you.

11 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
12 testimony. We will hear next from Christina Robbins.

13 MS. ROBBINS: Good evening. My name is
14 Christina Robbins. My children attend Langley
15 Elementary, a Title I pre-K 3 through fifth grade
16 elementary school in Ward 5 with over 330 students.
17 We are one of the few schools in DCPS with two BES
18 and four CES classrooms.

19 I'm here today to ask you for your help.
20 While are school family, staff and administration
21 have worked to improve test scores by double digits,
22 build a strong PTO and create a safe and loving

1 environment where students can thrive. We have
2 significant financial concerns outside of our
3 control. First, we are in desperate need of a full
4 facility modernization. Built in the 1920's Langley
5 was constructed to be a middle school.

6 We have only received phase one of
7 modernization back in 2011. Phase two and phase
8 three have yet to be assigned a date. Our student
9 bathrooms are in desperate need of upgrades, they
10 have no ventilation, and following the extremes of
11 hot and cold. The sinks are too high for young
12 children to reach, and most kids cannot even operate
13 the outdated faucets without the help of a grownup.

14 We also do not have a useable restroom on
15 the bottom two floors of our building. The one in
16 the cafeteria has a hole in the wall and only one
17 toilet. We need a new roof. We have had leaks all
18 over the building year after year. This leads to the
19 ceiling crumbling in classrooms, hallways and
20 throughout the school. DGS simply patches over the
21 problem.

22 We need a modern HVAC system. We have

1 radiators and window units. The system is not
2 properly maintained, and rooms are either extremely
3 hot, or extremely cold. Pipes burst and have flooded
4 rooms, damaging school supplies and furniture in an
5 already strapped Title I school.

6 There are no working intercoms in the
7 gyms, cafeteria and some offices, presenting a
8 liability to the safety of our students and
9 educators in the event of an emergency. Rodent
10 infestation has not been eradicated and the problem
11 will not be solved until the building is modernized.

12
13 These facility upgrades are not just nice
14 to have, they are necessary to ensure that our school
15 is safe and properly functioning. Second, funding
16 for students with special needs. One out of every
17 three of our students has an IEP. Half of our kids
18 are considered at-risk. As long as contained
19 classrooms exist at Langley, the position of
20 directors specialized instruction, needs to be a
21 permanent position, and all staff need to be trained
22 on the needs of these students.

1 The EES and CS classrooms enrollment rises
2 from the middle to the end of the year. Funding must
3 follow the students. If those with the highest needs
4 don't have what they need to succeed the whole school
5 suffers.

6 Lastly, funding the FoodPrints program.
7 Langley students have thrived with the foot prints
8 program, bring science and food education together
9 gives our children life-long skills. FoodPrints,
10 staff worked alongside our PTO to rebuild our
11 previously rat-infested garden, harvest a wide range
12 of crops and help plan our sage forest which is
13 bringing 70 fruit trees and bushes available for our
14 community for years to come.

15 Due to COVID FoodPrints experienced a
16 sizeable budget cut, and I encourage DCPS to fund
17 FoodPrints because it is vital to the sustaining of
18 our valuable program. Thank you and I invite you to
19 come to Langley.

20 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
21 testimony. We'll hear next from Claire Suntag.

22 MS. SUNTAG: Hi thank you. My name is

1 Claire Suntag and I'm speaking today in support of
2 the Reading and Dyslexia Bill, the 230150. I was an
3 elementary school teacher in Title I schools for 20
4 years with 11 years in DCPS until I resigned in the
5 Spring of 2019.

6 I now work as a tutor and a mentor at a
7 local institution that seeks to bring the science of
8 reading to the teachers and students of Washington,
9 D.C. I will speak to my experience as a first and
10 second grade classroom teacher, and most recently as
11 an EOL teacher for second graders.

12 With the notable exception of Wilson
13 Foundations, I never had any kind of training in
14 structured literacy practices or science of reading
15 practices. My last school was wholly committed to
16 the idea that guided reading would take care of any
17 reading problems. Yet every year would end with
18 three to four students being far below grade level in
19 reading.

20 The school where I worked most recently
21 had invested heavily in reading recovery, which is a
22 modified whole language approach to teaching reading.

1 When discussing a student who had shown no progress
2 after completing the program, I suggested that
3 perhaps the student could have dyslexia.

4 The leap reading coach who was also a
5 reading recovery teacher, informed me that it
6 couldn't be because "dyslexia is a myth and a
7 crutch," that was our leap reading coach. We tested
8 the students using their rules, but no one could
9 really afford to care about that data since teacher's
10 tasks -- part of impact scores were based solely on
11 the TRC.

12 That was all anyone could care about given
13 the high stakes. I think it's ridiculous to tie
14 these important assessments to either losing your
15 job, or getting a massive amount of money. Anyway,
16 as the saying goes, we treasure what we measure, and
17 while Dibels was measured, it was not treasured
18 because us teachers had little understanding of the
19 Dibels' assessments meant and which ones should be
20 used for which student.

21 During my time in DCPS I regularly had
22 second graders who did not know letter names or

1 sounds, and would never have been taught these
2 crucial basic building blocks of learning to read if
3 I hadn't done so. Teachers don't know that knowing
4 letter sounds is important for learning to read. I
5 am now voluntarily tutoring a DCPS third grader.
6 He's reading at the Kindergarten level.

7 When I told her teacher she didn't know
8 several letters sounds, they said, "Well we don't do
9 that. We just teach LLI and guided reading." Okay,
10 guided reading and LLI was all this child had been
11 having since first grade, and she still couldn't
12 read, so I don't understand why they're continuing to
13 use the same practices that don't work.

14 It's because DCPS teachers are not privy
15 to best practices for teaching reading. The
16 conclusion that many teachers have come to is that it
17 is perfectly normal and fine for the three to four
18 students from every class to remain far below grade
19 level for their entire school careers. And I was one
20 of these teachers until I learned about the science
21 of reading.

22 But these children do not deserve to be

1 casualties of administrator and teachers
2 unfamiliarity with how the brain acquires reading.
3 If this bill were passed, far fewer students would be
4 saddled with a life of humiliation, depression and
5 struggle, unable to capitalize on their many
6 strengths and reach their full potential when it
7 could have been so easily avoided by arming their
8 teachers on teaching reading. Thank you.

9 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your time.
10 Our next speaker will be Tilman Wuerschmidt.

11 MR. WUERSCHMIDT: Thank you for the
12 opportunity to testify today. Over the last decade
13 I've volunteered in different capacities at a number
14 of schools and education-related organizations. I
15 served on the Board of Appletree ELPCS on the
16 elementary school LSAT represented, that the Fillmore
17 and as a Board member of Fillmore.

18 Most recently I was instrumental in
19 developing and implementing the Middle School IT
20 service model. I'm also a member of the Digital
21 Equity Education Board. Today I'm testifying solely
22 as a parent of a ninth grader in School Without

1 Walls.

2 The importance of public education cannot
3 be over-emphasized. It is at the heart of a
4 prospering society, culturally, socially and
5 economically. And while there are other important
6 factors such as school culture, educators and
7 parent-run community involvement, adequate funding
8 levels are pre-requisite for the success of our
9 schools.

10 Therefore I'm asking you to guarantee
11 robust base line funding as recommended in the 2013
12 Education Adequacy for the Commission by the Office
13 of the Deputy Mayor for Education. The current
14 Schools Without Walls budget is roughly \$3,000.00 per
15 pupil below what the above mentioned study
16 recommends. At its current level of \$8,869.00 per
17 pupil funding, School Without Walls has difficulty to
18 provide the level of academic instruction that made
19 it a successful school.

20 Another important factor in setting
21 inadequate funding levels is budget transparency.
22 Specifically, at-risk funding should go to services

1 for at-risk students and not help fill in gaps in the
2 general school budgets.

3 Lastly, due to the pandemic conditions
4 Schools Without Walls will need to modify its
5 admission process. For the next school year this may
6 translate into a changed student body composition
7 that would require different services and
8 instruction. These changes should be reflected in
9 the school's budget and by giving the school the time
10 and resources planned for this new environment.

11 Thanks for your attention and I'm happy to
12 answer any questions you might have.

13 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
14 testimony. Okay at this time I will call our final
15 panel for the evening. Emmanuel Caudillo, Andrea
16 Erdmann, Heather Schoell, Charlotte Burrows, Julie
17 Lawson and Shandrika-Donowa-Jonkins. So we'll start
18 first with Emmanuel Caudillo.

19 MR. CAUDILLO: Thank you and good evening.
20 Thank you so much Chancellor and all the DCPS budget
21 staff. We appreciate you all listening to us this
22 evening. My name is Emmanuel Caudillo and I serve as

1 a member of the Regional Strategy Team of the D.C.
2 Education Coalition for Change.

3 You know the pandemic here has made very
4 clear the education gaps. You know many of us have
5 known that for years, but I think this pandemic has
6 shown just how wide it still is. And it's also made
7 clear that we have to be innovative, you know, we
8 can't just maintain the status quo once this pandemic
9 ends.

10 The time is ripe for a new normal. And
11 the goal isn't for the schools to simply go back to
12 what was considered normal pre-COVID, because the old
13 normal wasn't equitable. And so for over five years
14 DEC has fought for educational equity for all
15 students in the District of Columbia.

16 And we are working on getting stakeholders
17 to learn about the priorities that we are able to
18 share with you to ensure that our students are able
19 to succeed -- all students are able to succeed in
20 D.C. One area, for instance, is transportation. I
21 want to be sure that in the budget we have funded and
22 ensured our students are able to go to and from

1 school safely. And not just that, but also you're
2 able to arrive in school on time. And so we're
3 looking for strategies that allows us to have more
4 transportation supply, whether a lot of buses or
5 shuttles that enables our students to get from the
6 D.C. Metro to their school on time, so then they're
7 able to take advantage of all the classroom time.

8 In addition another area is looking at our
9 at-risk funding. We're going to see those gaps once
10 those students are back in class. And we're going to
11 have to make sure that that at-risk money is
12 protected. You know, we've seen that the at-risk
13 funding is used for operational costs when there is a
14 budget shortfall in our individual schools.

15 We cannot allow that to happen here. We
16 want to make sure that our at-risk funding is there
17 to provide those additional resources for all our
18 students, for those students that we talked about.
19 Because to us when I see at-risk I see at-promise.
20 And I want to be able to ensure that our students
21 have the opportunity to be prepared for college, to
22 be prepared for the workforce.

1 It's something that DCPS can fulfill a
2 promise to ensure that all students, no matter where
3 they're from, or no matter where they live, are able
4 to succeed in D.C., so that's one area we're looking
5 for. DEC continues to look forward to working with
6 DCPS and other groups to ensure that we keep that
7 promise to our students in this new normal. We're
8 holding a virtual platform assembly on December 3,
9 we're talking to communities about their educational
10 priorities and we look forward to sharing that with
11 you Chancellor, and the rest of the budget staff on
12 there.

13 Overall, we're here to help out to ensure
14 that our students succeed during this pandemic and
15 even afterwards, because it matters and it's
16 important. That's why I say thank you so much for
17 your time.

18 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your time and
19 your testimony. And we'll hear next from Andrea
20 Erdmann.

21 MS. ERDMANN: Good evening Chancellor
22 Ferebee. My name is Andrew Erdmann, I am the

1 treasurer of the Tacoma Education Campus Parent
2 Teacher Organization. Like many DCPS schools, Tacoma
3 Education Campus receives Title I resources to help
4 ensure that all students meet challenging academic
5 standards, but the federal resources are not
6 sufficient to provide an equitable educational
7 experience on par with the highest performing schools
8 in the District.

9 The Tacoma PTO respectfully requests four
10 things this evening. Number one -- equitable funding
11 that meets the academic, extra-curricular and social
12 emotional needs of the school community. We need to
13 have a conversation about the inherent inequities
14 that exist and are perpetuated by community
15 fundraising in the District of Columbia.

16 Affluent communities in D.C. provide more
17 financial resources to their in boundary schools and
18 have more time and social capital to raise those
19 funds. We therefore ask not that resources be taken
20 away from any school, but rather that less privileged
21 school communities like Tacoma, receive funding on
22 par with the total funding district and parent

1 supported, received in more privileged school
2 communities.

3 How can DCPS justify otherwise with the
4 equity goals it has so clearly articulated? Second
5 -- the Tacoma PTO is requesting that DCPS re-apply
6 for federal Head Start funding for school year
7 2021-22. Our school has lost approximately
8 \$110,000.00 worth of child supervision, family
9 services, and teacher support.

10 With the loss of the Head Start program,
11 our school also lost the valuable parent voice and
12 accountability promoted by the Head Start Policy
13 Council and parent committee. Number three -- the
14 Tacoma PTO is requesting personal hygiene
15 infrastructure in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic,
16 designed to keep our students and staff safe as they
17 work and learn in our school building, both during
18 and after the pandemic.

19 This includes hand-washing stations such
20 as commercial sinks with available hand-washing
21 stations for children and staff to wash their hands
22 before eating. It also includes water bottle filling

1 stations that will allow for hands free water
2 dispensing.

3 Number four -- our students can only
4 learn, and staff can only attend to their learning
5 when the physical school facility is in working
6 order. At present our school experiences chronic
7 leaking of the gymnasium, library, skywalk, and other
8 rooms in the school. We are thus requesting a
9 capital project to permanently fix the roof, so that
10 the students can be educated in a safe and
11 high-quality school facility.

12 With this testimony we endeavor to hold
13 DCPS accountable to its own mission that every school
14 provides world-class education that prepares all
15 students for success in college, career and life.
16 Thank you very much.

17 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
18 testimony. We'll hear next from Heather Schoell.

19 MS. SCHOELL: Hello. I'm Heather. I am
20 the PTO President at Eastern Senior High School and I
21 am in I believe my 50th year advocating on behalf of
22 children and D.C. public schools. And I found that I

1 have reputed myself year after year. My suggestions
2 are purely to help others and to correct injustices
3 that I've witnessed in these many years. And my hope
4 is that we have the courage to -- and the will, to
5 take advantage of this pause in business as usual to
6 make substantive changes for the betterment of the
7 whole for students now and those in the future.

8 So assuming that we someday will return to
9 normal in-person school times here's what I think
10 needs to change for upcoming budgets. First, money
11 should follow the student period. Charters purge
12 students and they wait until after their pupil count
13 to do it, because it's an effective strategy.

14 The students who require more services get
15 kicked out to schools who have to stretch to
16 accommodate their needs and the money doesn't follow
17 the child. It should immediately anyway cash out
18 fast.

19 If the per pupil allocation
20 is \$10,000.00 for example, then you calculate the
21 daily rate and then minus the days that they spent at
22 that school, and the remainder should be an instant

1 transfer to the next school. This is not only fair,
2 but it may encourage students to schools to work with
3 the student instead of transferring them.

4 Second, mental health support should be
5 allocated by need and not by school budget.

6 Currently we make the schools with the highest
7 at-risk students and the lowest PTA budgets, spend
8 their academic funds on mental health supports, and
9 this is not an equitable solution.

10 And it means that parents who live in
11 bounds for the poor schools, will try to go to the
12 schools with more resources for their children's
13 needs, which means that's less money for the inbound
14 grade schools, and it's a horrible cycle. And the
15 rich schools get richer and the poorer schools can't
16 seem to get a foothold.

17 You can improve this situation by putting
18 the correct number of behavioral health people in
19 schools based on need, not based on per pupil
20 allocation. Kids can't learn as well when they're
21 suffering from the trauma of what they've seen or
22 experienced. The healthiest children -- to have the

1 opportunity to work things out in their minds, in
2 their psyche so they can be ready to learn. I
3 worked that out with DBH.

4 Finally, facilities need to be healthy
5 buildings. If you go to most schools you can look at
6 their air vents and see how dirty and unfiltered they
7 are. Now more than ever, we should be making
8 certain that air quality is at least good. We can't
9 assume that it is for the sake of everyone in those
10 buildings and it's not enough to take DGS at their
11 word. That's like having kids grade their own
12 tests.

13 We need independent confirmation that
14 school buildings are healthy. We get a return of
15 investing because of trusts. Finally, bolster early
16 reading interventions, listen to teachers and
17 families, impact because time has passed. Fund
18 librarians, books, technology, use DCPR for school
19 sports. Thank you.

20 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
21 testimony. We'll turn next to Charlotte Burrows.

22 MS. BURROWS: Thank you. I appreciate the

1 opportunity to join you and testify today. Public
2 education is one of the very most important
3 investments that we can make as a society. The
4 District's social, cultural and economic success
5 depends on having well educated citizens, and as
6 such, strong support of DCPS funding across the board
7 is critical, so I appreciate the focus on this
8 important issue.

9 I'm testifying today solely in my capacity
10 as a parent of a student at the School Without Walls.
11 In determining the DCPS budget, I ask that you
12 consider four points. First, DCPS funding for FY2022
13 must sufficiently support student learning as
14 recommended in the 2013 education adequacy study,
15 commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for
16 Education.

17 The uniform per student funding should be
18 set for each school at the levels needed to ensure
19 reasonable class sizes, schedules that provide enough
20 time for teachers to plan and coordinate with other
21 educators and specialists, and adequate computers and
22 other supplies.

1 The 2013 adequacy study provides detailed
2 recommendations and explanations to help take the
3 guess work out of school funding calculations. And
4 we should make sure that we make good use of it.
5 Unfortunately, it's recommended per pupil funding
6 levels for DCPS schools often have not been met in
7 the past.

8 For instance, the per pupil funding for
9 School Without Walls is roughly \$3,000.00 less than
10 the study recommended back in 2013 even without
11 accounting for increases and inflation that have
12 occurred since then. It's essential to first set a
13 strong per pupil minimum, and then add any funding
14 needed for at-risk students, or other enhancements.

15 In the past, at-risk pupil funding has
16 been lumped in with overall per pupil funding, and
17 thus shortchanging all students. Second, DCPS budget
18 process should be transparent so that the public can
19 be fully informed throughout the process. For School
20 Without Walls this includes careful consideration of
21 and public input regarding how changes to the
22 admissions testing and interviews due to the pandemic

1 may result in additional costs in the future.

2 Third, School Without Walls current budget
3 is inadequate to sustain its academic program and
4 funding must increase for the school to continue
5 providing excellent education. And third, I would
6 like to add my voice to those who have called for
7 equity for DCPS. As an African-American parent,
8 committed to excellence, I think that is absolutely
9 vital going forward. I thank you for your
10 attention.

11 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
12 testimony. Next we'll turn to Julie Lawson.

13 MS. LAWSON: Good evening everyone. My
14 name is Julie Lawson. I am the parent of a fourth
15 grader at Whittier Education Campus. I am also the
16 PTO President and on the local School Advisory
17 Committee. I appreciate you having this hearing
18 tonight. We both really love our school, and we
19 cannot wait to be able to safely go back into the
20 building.

21 But when we do go back, Whittier still
22 won't have an elevator. Our elevator was in the

1 small capital plan for this year, but the funding was
2 reprogrammed for other needs. We have two buildings;
3 one was built in 1961 and one in 1926. Both
4 buildings are three stories accessed only by stairs.
5 Teachers have sustained injuries and taken leave
6 because of climbing stairs to their classrooms.

7 Families are choosing other schools
8 because their children require mobility devices and
9 can't access their own classroom. How does D.C.
10 public schools tolerate this in 2020? Meanwhile in
11 an effort to stabilize our enrollment as we
12 transition back to an elementary school, central
13 office is adding self-contained classrooms to our
14 enrollment, bringing more kids with significant
15 developmental delays into a building that is
16 difficult to get around.

17 We don't even have enough classrooms with
18 bathrooms inside to accommodate the needs of our
19 existing early childhood and special education
20 students. While the elevator is an urgent need, it's
21 a band-aid to the real problem that our buildings are
22 in disrepair. We're not in the capital budget for

1 modernization until fiscal 2026 when our primary
2 building will be 100 years old.

3 Staff are regularly contending with HVAC
4 floods and leaks. We finally got our roof replaced
5 this summer only to have new leaks arise immediately
6 after the scaffolding was taken down. I understand
7 that there are competing needs for District dollars,
8 whether to mix throwing a few million dollars in
9 repairs here and there, without accelerating a true
10 holistic solution, just makes the overall costs of
11 the District even higher.

12 Please, please move us up in the capital
13 plan. Thank you. I know I'm one of the last
14 speakers tonight and I appreciate your patience with
15 all of us tonight and I look forward to continuing to
16 work with you.

17 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
18 testimony. And our final speaker for the evening is
19 Shandrika Donowa-Jonkins.

20 MS. DONOWA-JONKINS: Good evening
21 Chancellor Ferebee, parents, teachers, educators,
22 friends of students and DCPS. I'm here as a parent

1 of a child at Walls and I'm looking for three things.
2 One, transparency in how you deal with Walls in terms
3 of our leadership, in terms of our budget, and in
4 terms of how we would include students.

5 Two, I'm looking for the official funding
6 for per student capital for our students. And three,
7 if you are changing how you recruit students to
8 Walls, I'm looking for a separate budget line for
9 at-risk students. I would like to talk about this a
10 little further.

11 I almost feel offended that DCPS believes
12 that Walls is such a good place that you can just
13 take things from us, or give us less when our
14 students are also in this pandemic. They are also
15 having mental health issues. They are also dealing
16 with loss, and yet you removed teachers or a
17 principal that has had a lasting impact on their
18 life.

19 You have threatened to remove teachers and
20 counselors to do the school reopening which caused
21 children to have a lot of anxiety. Our students
22 already have anxiety from the workload that they

1 have, and we are proud of the work that they're
2 doing, and they can handle it.

3 But all of the other stuff that you're
4 adding is not putting students first. It's not even
5 acknowledging that the students at Walls themselves
6 have needs. Second, for you to change the
7 admissions process -- I understand that D.C. wants to
8 level the playing field. However, the issue is not a
9 Walls issue, it is not the application process. It
10 is the access that students need or don't have in
11 their middle and elementary schools to the type of
12 education that will prepare them for a school like
13 Walls.

14 There should be more Walls in D.C. D.C.
15 doesn't have gifted and talented. D.C. does not have
16 TAG, and so students do not have an opportunity. We
17 want to level everything so that everybody has
18 access. Well we're forgetting the kids who need the
19 TAG program, who need the MAGNET schools, who don't
20 fit in or who will act out probably in a school that
21 doesn't rise to their occasion.

22 When you bring in more students that have

1 greater needs like -- I'm sorry when you bring in
2 students that have needs like at-risk students or
3 enhancement needs, you're going to have to forfeit
4 something or add to the budget. I'm asking you to
5 add to the budget if you're going to change our
6 application process.

7 Do not remove anything from our existing
8 students. Do not remove anything from my son who is
9 an existing African-American male at Walls. Lastly,
10 please raise the per capita for our students. They
11 deserve this. They're working for it. Please give
12 them what they need to succeed and thrive in our
13 school.

14 We are already the smallest school in D.C.
15 We already have one of the smallest budgets, please
16 give us what we need to help support the students
17 academically, socially and mentally. With that I'm
18 just going to close out. Thank you for your time.

19 MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
20 testimony. And with that we're going to close. I
21 will first start out by saying thank you to everybody
22 for sharing your words tonight and thank you to those

1 who are listening on a YouTube station. We know how
2 busy your lives are and deeply appreciate you taking
3 the time to join us and for your continued commitment
4 to our schools, our educators and our students during
5 this critical time for them.

6 And so as we move forward with planning, I
7 really just encourage you to continue to stay
8 involved. Your school principal should be sharing
9 information and your LSAT school level planning
10 events, so we encourage you to stay involved there
11 and be part of your LSAT and have that participation
12 as part of something you can do on an ongoing basis
13 in your school if you haven't done so already.

14 And with that I will turn it back to
15 Chancellor Ferebee.

16 CHANCELLOR FEREBEE: Thank you. And thank
17 you again for tonight's participation. Thank you for
18 attending the hearing. We value your feedback and
19 your recommendations, and we will take your thoughts
20 and ideas in consideration as we plan for the budget
21 for the upcoming school year.

22 We hope everyone continues to remain safe

1 and healthy during this Thanksgiving break. And at
2 this time we will conclude our hearing. Thank you
3 again.

4 (Whereupon the hearing adjourned at 8:04
5 p.m.)

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