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.
PROCEEDINGS
(5:00 p.m.)

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

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

And here's our agenda for this evening. You will begin with an introduction and overview by Chancellor Ferebee followed by public testimony. We will be hearing from community members, parents, organizations and others during this period. We ask if you're not presenting to please turn yourself on mute and turn off your cameras.
We will be live-streaming the hearing through our D.C. Public Schools YouTube page at the web address at the bottom of the screen. If you're experiencing challenges connecting this evening, please communicate with the host. For those of you who are on the Zoom, use the chat box, or you may send an email to CO.info@k-12.dc.gov. That's our email address again. CO.info@k-12.dc.gov. And we also have ASL interpretation available as well as Spanish interpretation if needed. So with that I will now turn it over to Chancellor Ferebee.

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

Tonight we're share our priorities and where we're hoping to lead in the coming years. DCPS will hear what you are thinking per your testimony, testimony from parents and the community members tonight will be shared. Tonight is also the
beginning of the dialogue -- not the end.  

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

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

Students also feel loved, challenged and prepared and also have meaningful experiences. And then with all these things that happened, we ultimately want our schools to improve and families
want to choose DCPS. From our conversations tonight with school leaders, families, our teachers, our principals, our advisory boards, as well as feedback from our family surveys and public engagement, we know that there are four areas of focus for this upcoming fiscal year -- fiscal year '22.

We know we'll be done with the impact of COVID-19 and the impact it is having on our entire system, as well as to next school year, and we want to be responsive and keep those needs in mind. Those four focus areas are: Responding to the increase in student need.

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

But tonight we do want to focus our conversation on our school budgets, and there will be
plenty of opportunities for you to share feedback and
feedback on our reopening plans for term three. For
additional questions on reopening, I encourage you
all to go to our website at DCPSreopenstrong.com.
Now I'll turn it back over to Sharon.

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

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

And so as our schools reopen their doors,
we know that student's needs need to inform our path
moving forward. Given these shifts we want to spend
additional time engaging with our educators, school
leaders and community members before we move ahead
with school budget model solutions designed to
increase transparency and equity.

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

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

LSAT's are school-based advisory groups
made of parents, staff and community members who work
with principals on a range of topics, including
identifying school priorities and developing the
school's budget. If you're interested in more
information about your school's LSAT contact your
principal, or you'll see the CEO.info email on the
screen, where you can also reach out for more
information.

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

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

The principal and the school's
administrative staff holds the election process with
the systems of the DCPS community action team member
-- CAP member. Each school should have a functioning
LSAT body by the end of the September for the
upcoming school year. So for example, that cycle
involves elections being held in May and June of a
school year, in advance for the upcoming school year
in order to be in place by September.

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

And so let me share some logistics for
tonight. For those of you who we'll hear from, we
ask that you lease keep your testimony to three
minutes. We will keep time and provide a gentle
reminder when your time is up. We do this just to
ensure that everybody has an opportunity to be heard.
Groups should identify one speaker, and that speaker can then testify on behalf of the group. I encourage everybody to speak slowly and clearly because we have a recorder who is recording your testimony for the official record and we want to make sure we get it right.

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

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

If when you arrive please message our host in the chat to say that you're present to speak. We want to make sure we're able to bring you on seamlessly. If you are presenting, please keep your cameras off and mic's on mute until you're ready to testify. And then finally, if you haven't done so
already, please send your testimony in either a PDF or a Word version document if you haven't done so already to the DCEO.info email on the screen.

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

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

MS. BABCOCK: Good evening Chancellor Ferebee and everyone here tonight. My name is Marion Babcock, and I'm a parent of a current wall student and two wall's alumni. Like all of DCPS magnet schools, School Without Walls has its own unique culture and course offerings, being a rigorous college preparatory program situated on the college -- on the George Washington University Campus, hundreds of highly motivated and curious students
from all eight city wards will apply to become global citizens and partners in crafting their own college experience while they attend high school.

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

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

Because of this our parents petitioned you and city council members to minimize the losses so that we can maintain the school students and families expect us to be. In light of last year's drastic underfunding, the ensuing advocacy, the removal of Principal Trogisch, and the problems we face because of educational needs revealed during this pandemic, I
request that you approach the budget with these following principals in mind.

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

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

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

CHANCELLOR FEREBEE: Thank you. Thank you
for choosing DCPS.

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

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

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

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

Over the past three months we have collected feedback from our school communities, held interviews on focus groups and conducted a parent
survey. Based on these inputs we believe the top needs for digital equity to be the following:

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

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

Number two -- tech support and asset management. While DCPA started a family call center for tech support issues, we continued to hear that much of the burden for troubleshooting tech problems
and managing equipment is still falling on school staff who already have full-time jobs and are not trained in tech support.

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

Number three -- practical training.

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

And number four -- internet. We do not think that continuing to spend significant funding for monthly data plans, hot spots, and LTE enabled devices is sustainable. We urge you to work with OPTO on a more long-term internet solution for the
city, and we are puzzled that DCPS is not working
closer to transition snap and tentative households
onto OPTO's Internet for All Program targeting those
households, which would reduce the need for some of
the hot spots and monthly data plans being paid by
DCPS.

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

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

MR. HOLMES: Good evening Chancellor and
DCPS executive team. My name is Antawan Holmes, I'm
a parent at Houston Elementary School and a Chair for
advisory neighborhood 7C. At many of our community
meetings throughout Ward 7, parents to continue to
express concerns about the following issues:
No equitable dual language middle school option located east of the river for Houston Elementary School, lack of comprehensive technology plans to include sustainable PC upgrades, equitable internet access, and best in class technical service, and a lack of a pathway to an equitable post-secondary education from DCPS to a university of District of Columbia located east of the river.

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

This amount of travel over time is a quality of life issue and causes undue burden on families. We recommend that DCPS extend Houston ES,
Houston elementary children an education campus to allow dual language students to continue their studies.

This pandemic has shown us that DCPS is still not fully funded to enable effective distance learning and prepare our students for transition into the 21st Century information technology careers. Although some gains were made since testifying last year, we continue to see challenges in the following:

a lack of comprehensive multi-year DCPS technology plan, stop gap fixes for internet inadequate bandwidth speed to complete daily distance learning.

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

Either centralized technical support calls, or decentralized teams and deployment teams, or to hire dedicated local support staff at each
school to improve quality or technology support. And then finally, partner with OPTO to create true internet for all solutions such as municipal WIFI, which would be a sustainable city-wide solution for all District residents, especially Ward 7, which would impact the greatest from a digital divide.

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

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

Thank you.

MS. GASKINS: Thank you Mr. Holmes. We'll
hear next from Bernice King.

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

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

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

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

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

And we know this can be achieved by having a full-time music teacher. Moreover, our scholars have a new library. It would be best to fully utilize these spaces with the presence of a full-time staff person. As we seek to close the achievement gap, we have that full-time librarian and studies show that students with full-time librarian services
are able to achieve their educational goals.

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

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

We'd also like to bring to the attention of the processing on purchasing on a visitor management badging system which will allow us to check all visitors against the school or district databases and provide a more secure means to make sure that a parent and a guardian has signed-in and signed-out of school the proper way.
MS. GASKINS: Okay. I believe Miss King has wrapped up her testimony. We will ask Cedric Hendricks to please turn on your mic and camera.

We'll hear from you next. Sir you're on mute.

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

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

But as a result we have a critical need for additional staffing and coaching assistance. And accordingly, we request two additional staff members
for coaching assistants. We have a large number of students that need reading interventions, and we really don't have the staff to get them. And you know how critical reading is for student growth.

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

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

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

A full-time coach would be ideal for
pre-K, but also help out --

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

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

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

MS. WELLS: My name is Suzanne Wells, and I am the President of the Ward 6 public schools parent organization. School year 21-22 will
undoubtedly be challenging. We trust teachers and
students will be back in their classrooms after
almost a year or maybe more of online learning.

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

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

We support the decision to continue with
the comprehensive staffing model for the school year.
Ideally before final decisions are made on a new
budget model, schools should be able to see what
their school budgets would be under the comprehensive
staffing model and under the new model DCPS is
considering.

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

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

DCPS has lost the trust of many families
during COVID and will need to do relationship
building and additional outreach to attract families
to enroll. Even if school enrollments decline,
schools will need staff stability. When we return to
school we will need more -- not fewer, staff available to help students catch up. It will only further exacerbate learning losses if schools have to cut staff.

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

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

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

MS. CRINER-BROWN: Good evening everyone, to the Chancellor and all. Thank you for your providing this opportunity. I'm jotting from notes, so please bear with me. I don't have a written
testimony to submit. I'm just going to try to hit these points as quickly as I can.

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

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

And so what I've seen consistently is that every year when the LSAT's meet, it's what do we cut this year? Even if the actual number has gone up, the buying power hasn't gone up. And I think there's a real concern that this may accelerate the decline in investment in our neighborhood schools in
particular, and as that continues, people will just continue to not send their children if they schools are not adequately invested in.

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

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

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

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

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

Our schools were not able to fully support
a lot already going into this pandemic. The students were struggling. Teachers were struggling in particular areas more than others, so we want to as a community, we want to have the confidence in our schools.

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

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

As DCPS develops its new budgeting model, we urge DCPS to consider the impact of the model on staff's ability at schools. Next year we will need staff to help students recover from learning loss during the pandemic. This includes not just
teachers, but also reading and math interventionists, social workers and other support staff.

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

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

Given reduced school enrollment during the pandemic and the connection between enrollment numbers and school funding, we are concerned that our school and others will be penalized due to circumstances totally out of our control. We urge
you to hold schools harmless for enrollment declines that occur during the pandemic.

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

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

We also urge you to continue the movement towards a one to one student device ratio and to fund computers for teachers. We endorse the recommendations of the digital equity in DC education
parent coalition, including the recommendation that DCPS finally develop and fund a comprehensive technology plan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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

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

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

The loss would have been greater had we notpetitioned for restoring positions that were
eliminated in the initial proposed allocation. As a school we worry about how this will play out in 2022. While we do not expect any drops in enrollment, I worry about other schools. I join fellow community members in asking for DCPS to hold school budgets harmless in school year 22.

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

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

Admitting students is only the beginning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I first want to ask that though a small subset of the overall student population, students
with complex disabilities would receive due consideration in our budgeting priorities, including support for additional staff and specialized curricula, and increased community-based options.

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

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

Thirdly, while meeting students and teachers needs for sufficient devices an internet
bandwidth is especially crucial for distance learning. A one to one student to device ratio and sufficient internet access is a minimal requirement for a 21st Century education. For that reason, I comment to you the call from Digital Equity and DC Education for a comprehensive DCPS technology plan including devices for every student and teacher, tech support, and digital literacy support, and to push for and collaborate on a city-wide infrastructure to provide adequate internet access to all.

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
testimony. I'm going to call up some additional people by name. Neo Morake, Qubilah Huddleston, Jessica Sutter, and Cathy Reilly. We'll start with Neo Morake. Is Neo Morake on the call? Okay. Perhaps we can circle back. Can I ask Qubilah Huddleston?

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

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

Second, DCPS should genuinely engage local school advisory teams to assess needs and develop policy and budget alternatives to student safety and school security in the upcoming school year. All
District families are experiencing massive pandemic induced disruptions to their daily lives.

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

The public health crisis has only exacerbated the already unacceptable racial and income gaps and learning outcomes in the district.

Now more than ever, DCPS must prioritize equity over equality. DCPS needs to make bold and economically just investments in schools to help ensure children from resource strapped families are not further left behind academically or socially.

To ensure fiscal year 22 school budgets are equitable, DCPS should at a minimum, fund schools at their fiscal year 21 level, and ensure that dollars meant to support students already at risk of academic failure supplement not supplant school
To date DCPS has routinely relied on these dollars to cover basic educational services. Instead of allowing schools to use the funds as they were intended to provide additional resources that mostly low income black and brown students need to overcome barriers in and out of the classroom.

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

Importantly, as the district aims to reimagine student safety as school security, including reprioritizing moneys spent on security guards, LSAT's and other community oriented stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in the policy and budget process.
Black youth and families who are disproportionately harmed by school policing culture, should especially have a say in the development of alternatives in the decision-making process. An example of meaningful engagement at a particular school could look like requesting volunteers or appointing and providing stipends to qualified student's, educators, and other school community members to oversees the evaluation, adoption and implementation, of the final recommendations in the forthcoming report from the DC Commission on Police Reporting.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Thank you.

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

MS. SUTTER: Thank you Chancellor Ferebee and DCPS budget team for the chance to speak this evening. My name is Jessica Sutter and I'm honored to represent Ward 6 on the DC State Board of Education. I'm going to say a lot of things you've heard from others this evening.
A year ago I sat before you in Maury Elementary to testify about resource inequity in our schools. I shared my concerns that our neighborhood schools are not an equal opportunity public resource, but rather institutions that mirror broader inequities in the District.

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

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

One -- build a budget truly designed for
equity. The next school year will begin with a mix of students who've lived vastly different lives during this pandemic. It will also likely begin with less money. DCPS must build a budget which prioritizes children who've been most distanced from robust educational opportunities this past year.

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

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

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

And three -- build a budget with a vision
for the kind of education every child in DC truly
deserves. I hope that the pandemic has forced us to
see that many children were not thriving in the
schools that shut down in March. All DC children
deserve schools with access to well-rounded
programming, PE, recess, art, music, world languages,
science, social studies, field trips.

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

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

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

MS. REILLY: Folks thank you for this
opportunity to testify. My name is Cathy Reilly and I'm the Director of SHAPPE, the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators, as well as the facilitator for the Ward 4 Ed Alliance. And both groups are members of C for DC.

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

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

The pupil count lost this year will increase unless the message from DCPS is that we will indeed open strong. Reinvestment -- this is the year of transitioning and re-envisioning the school
security and safety. I hope that we can start on the planning for that. The effort has been to reallocate the resources that have gone to policing and discipline, to more proactive and supportive initiatives within the schools.

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

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

I understand you will be starting some of this at the local level with the reopening, and I
hope that that will continue and actually expand.
Those of us that were working with you on the reopening in October was a compete surprise, so I hope that doesn't happen again.

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

Thank you.

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Yes.

MS. MORAKE: Perfect. Good evening. My name is Neo Morake and I serve as the community representative on the Amidon Bowen Elementary LSAT.
I am a Ward 6 and southwest DC resident, as well as an alum of Amidon Bowen. During the pandemic we've seen community organizations like the Ward 6 mutual aid network, and local churches step up to help southwest DC families in need, including those at the Greenleaf and James Creek Public Housing Complexes.

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

Before the pandemic Amidon Bowen was on an upward trajectory. The addition of a reading specialist and a math intervention coach three years ago contributed significantly to academic gains, measured by both park scores and internal school assessments. Additionally, supplemental instructional staff have become invaluable members of our school community. They know our students across all grades provide unique expertise and they serve our school outside their regular duties.
However, these positions are temporary, and every year we must negotiate to keep them. It takes years to recruit, train and incorporate our newest members into the fabric of our school. If the Bowser's administration budget results in staffing cuts to schools like ours, we can lose these staff which could setback progress for years.

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

The Dahlstrom DIBELS testing also showed that our younger students are behind compared to growth made in prior years. A large factor in this academic loss is a lack of resources in in-person access available to our students. We cannot afford to lose our best staff due to budget cuts. In fact schools like ours that serve a large at-risk student population should have additional staff to help
students catch up and recover from learning losses experienced during the pandemic.

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony Neo. And with that I'll turn to our next panel who I will call up right now. Karen Janka, Stefany
Thangavelu, Elizabeth Davis, Saylor Silicki and Amber Golden. We'll start first with Karen Janka.

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

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

Students don't speak English at home, and children in poverty can be among those who benefit
the most. School library programs foster critical thinking, providing students with the skills they need to analyze, form and communicate ideas in compelling ways.

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

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

In 2019 our entire collection consisted of 5,423 books, that is fiction and non-fiction, which is about 14 books per student. That's shockingly low
compared to the national average of 25 books per student. The school library is the primary place where students get books.

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

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

In the school year 2022 D.C. public schools once again -- thank you.
MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony. We'll hear from Stefany Thangavelu next.

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

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

Pertaining to considerations for the DCPS budget, I want to encourage the Council to focus on equity, not equality. Given the diversity of schools and communities across the District, not everyone needs the same thing. We cannot have a cookie cutter approach to school reopening or planning because this
will not meet the needs of the school to budget and staff appropriately for those in the classroom.

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

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

I also want to speak about making investments in the future and then doing cost-benefit analysis during planning and construction for DCPS. At Maury Elementary we were told that DCPS would not have the money to include hand washing stations in
the cafeteria during our modernization, and this was not in the building specifications. We had to fight for what is a basic hygiene and health standard for reduction of disease infection among children, and thankfully those were included at Maury.

However, they might have been if parent advocates had not been so persistent in ensuring DCPS took the necessary longer term mindset pertaining to health and wellbeing of students in our schools. Another quick example is that we were told that DCPS, that the additional cost of $150.00 per machine to purchase just a water auto-filling station that included an indicator light to replace the water filter, was too much.

Well what is the cost of not replacing the filter and having lead in our schools again? Due to this fact that we've cut corners and had open -- we have not had open and transparent investments. Parents have become advocates and must always verify and hold DCPS accountable to deliver on the promise of quality education for all.

We must be able to trust DCPS, but
currently this is lacking, and I hope that this year
we will invest in buying back the community's trust
and prioritize equity as we invest in our kids for a
better tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to
testify today.

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

MS. DAVIS: Thank you and good evening.

I'm Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington
Teacher's Union and also a Ward 5 resident. And as a
career educator I've learned early on that our
students are only limited by the opportunities that
we provide them.

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

We also expect DCPS to prioritize
transparency and be engaged in a local school
advisory team as it considers changes to its local school funding model and making decisions about the programmatic funding for the school year '21-'22. We believe our city's FY22 educational budget should number one, ensure that our teachers and students are safe when we reopen schools to in-person learning.

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

    We encourage DCPS to remove high stakes testing from teacher evaluations and instead invest in programs to support teacher growth and development. This includes robust research-based professional development. Programs that support student loan forgiveness and tax credits to public servants who live in the communities where they
As the WTU look at the FY22 budget at the individual school level, we're looking for investments that are equitable. Investments that will help our city's students recover from the health pandemic, and prioritize closing the opportunity that teachers have that continues to plaque our city.

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

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

teach.
budget authority.

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

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

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

MS. SILICKI: Hello. My name is Saylor Elouise Silicki. It has been a year now since I last testified for the dyslexia bill and a lot has changed. I'm now going to a school called the Sienna School and it specializes on dyslexic kids like me.
I first started the Sienna School halfway through last year and it was really scary.

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

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

I believe one day I will be using a lot of his strategies. For high school I would like to go to Duke Ellington School of Arts to study art, but I have to balance art with learning. So I have to get
more strategies so I can pass school and get in. Luckily, my school has a lot of strategies for dyslexic kids that work for me.

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

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

I felt like the dumbest kid in the class. I always left the room for tests and lessons and I
felt left out and lonely. My teachers did not know
how to teach a dyslexic kid. Even the teachers who
were pulling me out didn't always understand how I
learned, and they seemed to go slower, or that I
didn't have to do the assignments or tests, or
projects at all.

I believe that all teachers should go
through a dyslexic training, so they know how to help
their dyslexic students. Research shows that
strategies for dyslexic kids will also help first
students who are not dyslexic. When looking at the
data from 2019, it is clear that we are not meeting
dyslexic students needs, and we must do better.

Please fully fund this bill so that every child can
feel good about themselves. Thank you.

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

MS. GOLDEN: Good evening Chancellor
Ferebee and to all attending. I am Amber Golden, PTO
President at Duke Ellington High School of the Arts,
LSAT member and parent of a senior visual arts
student. I am testifying about the persistent under-funding of our school by DCPS.

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

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

Duke Ellington is the only school with an intense instruction in the pursuit of the arts. Duke's individual instruction, small group classes
and specialty programming and supplies do not fit into the regular funding categories of other DCPS high schools. Such personal lives, career and paired professional instruction is inherently more costly than classes for which Carnegie credits are awarded.

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

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

There is a solution here. DCPS must recognize the unique needs of Duke Ellington. Duke is a world-class arts high school and needs to be
recognized and supported as such if it is to continue. Duke is also one of DCPS's best academic schools. It should be noted that Duke does not have academic prerequisites for admission.

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

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

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

MS. WINSTON: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Nakisha
Winston and I'm a DCPS parent and a Chair of a local school advisory team at Bard High School Early College. On behalf of our LSAT, I would like to thank you for convening this hearing to gather input from the public about the upcoming fiscal year 2022 budget.

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

My testimony today will highlight some of those areas and possible budgetary solutions, expanding Summer Bridge. Typically our Summer Bridge program has been limited to students entering Bard in the ninth grade. At Bard this consists of a week-long learning experience called a writing and thinking workshop.
Faculty members from all the disciplines lead sections of students in critical reading and writing exercises to develop their thinking. We believe Summer Bridge should be expanded to all grades this upcoming school year. Entering as well as returning students will need to access social emotional learning focused on rebuilding our community before academic work can resume.

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

We strongly believe this required team-building opportunities to assist our students in their adjustment returning to in-person instruction. The Bard community is an intimate intellectual community. Students are expected to be able to work with each other. There are certain foundational skills necessary to listen to ideas that differ from
Through Summer Bridge, students learn to present their work to their classmates, as well as provide thoughtful criticism on their classmate's work. Although these skills can be worked on virtually, it takes on a different dynamic when students are face to face with their peers.

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

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

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

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

They should be using the same culture and climate as the rest of the school staff including the story of justice practices, the student's positive behavior innovation in the support. The 2022 budget should include funds for the school's budget to allow them to train school security office and PBIS, so they're fully integrated in the school community.
Thank you for convening this hearing.

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

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

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

We provide a tutor since we moved to District in 2018 that costs us over $30,000.00 the last two years. We as parents, will spend two hours per day to help with her learning at home after we moved to District in 2018. Yet she's still struggling in reading and writing. There is no question dyslexia screenings, teacher training,
appropriate resources, science-based reading
instructions like also getting that approach will
help dyslexia kids like my daughter in the District.

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

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

Research shows in terms of reading
intervention in Kindergarten and first grade is most
effective, but also data shows that a majority of
D.C.'s students is identified as having a specific learning disability after this optimal age. Even though we provide a great amount of support at home, the amount of dyslexic appropriate interventions at school makes her continue to be a struggled reader and writer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We know that there will be a huge
Thanksgiving spike in the coming weeks and again after Christmas and New Years and this irresponsible choice makes me fear that DCPS will continue to try and reopen in February, and the long-term health and trust damage that will be done between DCPS and students, teachers, parents and the community will be irredeemable.

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

You have to be far more inclusive and systemic in how we plan our reopening and the budget, and do more than we ever had under control to discuss the deep-seeded inequities that are still occurring between our students and schools. Yes, trying to get around the duly elected LSAT and SKAG teams by creating another group for your reopening plan is the
exact kind of move that removes trust from those of us involved.

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

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

DCPS need to ensure that schools are receiving their full at-risk ELO and special
education funds, and not using them to supplant the funds that schools are typically owed based on the comprehensive staffing model. DCPS central office has still not fixed the problems pointed out by the D.C. auditor, and that goes for other targeted funds. This is a violation of local and federal law and must be rectified now more than ever. DCPS should hold schools as harmless as possible for the student enrollment this year. Typically their three year cycle means one bad year on enrollment can lead to several years of budget losses for a school. It should not lead to that kind of loss.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

Whenever kids are back in person, schools
have to spend big on things like facilities, updates,
PPE and facility cleaning. As long as we remain
online only, we're buying extra laptops and internet
hotspots. As long as DCPS is attempting to do both,
it's a double whammy of new costs and that is before
we even get to recovery when we are more readily able
to address the likely lost months of learning.

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

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

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

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony. And we'll hear next from Nierria Jones-Cooper. I'm afraid we can't hear you. Okay. Miss Jones-Cooper might have jumped off.
MS. JONES-COOPER: No I'm here. Can you hear me?

MS. GASKINS: Sure can.

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

MS. GASKINS: Okay. Feel free to proceed.

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

Before I talk about Phelps, I want to talk about my son. My son was diagnosed with autism when he was three. He lived in Georgia at that time. I researched school districts across the country and D.C. is where I felt he could excel. I wanted my son to be a DCPS graduate.
My son has always felt bored and not interested in school, but I saw something change in him when we first visited Phelps open house. He saw the HVAC machines and the construction room, and for the first time I saw my son interested in his education. For him, he had found his people.

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

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

On the second day of school he had what I like to call a MacGyver project. I've never seen a
place encourage and foster open minds the way Phelps has. It truly is a unique place. The next word I want to talk about are options or is options. Scholars have felt not only taking courses to get them college ready, but Phelps also allows an opportunity for scholars to go from high school straight into a career -- notice I didn't say job.

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

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

The last word I want to talk about is equity and how equity connects uniqueness and options. In past years Phelps has struggled in terms
of its budget. In previous years, through stabilization funds and other gap funds that were provided by DCPS, Phelps has been able to offset some cutbacks, but has had to limit what it can provide scholars.

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

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

We know that enrollment numbers have been shaky over the years, but Phelps has been making efforts to climb. This past school year we exceeded
MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony. Okay and the next panel I will call includes Elizabeth Mitchell, Laura Segal, Stanley Keen, Katy Button and Tonia Bain. So we'll start with Elizabeth Mitchell.

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

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

We have no idea what our fall enrollment
numbers will be, but we do know that the number of
student in our virtual classrooms is dropping as
parents pursue other programs, and students struggle
to keep up in isolation and amidst the collective
stress of the pandemic.

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

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

DCPS has already identified this issue,
but I haven't heard a single workable plan to address
it yet. It is abundantly clear that we need extra
teachers, tutors and staff to help tackle this mounting problem. We need to invest now, so that we can hire background check, and train the staff we need in the fall and beyond. I implore DCPS to work with principals in schools to find out what they're going to need going forward.

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

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

We will be grappling with these losses for
the rest of our lives, but right now so many of our students are suffering from depression, anxiety and other mental illness. This is already a huge burden for our schools and teachers, so let's support them by hiring the staff they need and help provide support, services and screening.

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

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

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

My son Johnnie could be the poster kid for
the benefit of these programs. In pre-K and Kindergarten, we and his teachers kept waiting for his reading to click. We waited and waited. And everyone said it will connect, it will just happen. We kept receiving assessments through first and second grade, "It's on the cusp, it's going to happen any time now."

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

In third grade he received some services and supports, but they weren't adequate. But they said, "He was kind of on grade level," and what we found out later when we got back from private testing when it just didn't feel right, was his fluency was still at 16 percent, but his comprehension was at 99 percent, and they were
averaging, and that's how they look at these programs during the IEP.

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

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

And you think of the reading divide in the city and in hindsight it's just beyond frustrating to
know that the knowledge and ability to screen kids really pretty easily, the same way you do for vision and hearing. And that we know from brainstorming how to address these problems, but the schools in D.C. are not providing it to the students. We need to acknowledge all of these children and bright and capable, but they need a chance. They just need to learn to read differently than they're being taught. Now is the chance to make that difference by funding the screening services and supports for the dyslexia program and addressing the reading gap for real. Thank you.

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

MR. KEEN: Hi. I'm Stan Keen. I recognize that I'm a man of privilege and one of my privileges is the ability to even find time to be here with you tonight, and I'm privileged to be here with you tonight. I am privileged to have been a federal employee for about 30 years and to be married to my husband for about the same amount of time and that we have two amazing daughters. I'm proud to be
a new citizen of the District, having moved up here in the past year from Georgia, like Miss Jones-Cooper whose testimony touched me tonight.

And I'm proud that my daughters are following in my footsteps in a public school system, specifically at Walls High School. I'm here to use the privileges that I have to advocate for those who may not be here tonight, or cannot be here tonight.

I urge you to pay close attention to the testimony that you've heard so far about equity, equality, technology, transparency and the effects of the pandemic.

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

I urge the school system to set a strong well-defined per student minimum of spending. I urge
that those student minimums carry through high
school. I urge the school system to clearly and
transparently authorize supplemental findings for
at-risk and special needs students, not to bury those
costs in general funding, and to allow the students
the flexibility to use them creatively and
appropriately for their school.

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

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

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

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

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

    This year, although the funding from DCPS
is zero dollars, -- does require $272,000.00 to fund
the first year of the bill. My daughter is like many
of the families you've heard from today already,
suffers from dyslexia. She was diagnosed very late
and beyond the window for any kind of full remediation. And like many of the families that you have heard from and will hear from we fought the special education team at my daughter's elementary school, Janney Elementary, for years trying to get her proper diagnosis and treatment.

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

And then I learned that five other children in her grade alone at Janney were diagnosed as having ADD when they were all in fact moderately to severely dyslexic. These children have all suffered from varying kinds of stress, anxiety and mental illness because of being misdiagnosed, and
being called careless readers and sloppy spellers,
even though again as early as Kindergarten it was
obvious these kids had a diagnosable reading
disability.

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

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

My daughter's Kindergarten teacher, again
called her a sloppy speller and a careless reader.
Her first grade teacher said just look at the
pictures and let that help you understand what the
words say. These teachers have clearly never been introduced to the science of reading, and that transferred also to the special ed teachers that she was seeing.

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

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

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

It's heartbreaking when you're child who loves to be read books about Mars, who thinks about
where the universe ends, who teaches you about viral
stages, tells you that he hates science because he
struggles to read hand-outs, or to write in class.
My nine year old son was diagnosed with dyslexia a
year and a half ago, just before he started third
grade, but the truth is he had showed classic signs
of dyslexia long before then.

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

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

In fact, most teachers, even special
education teachers, are provided little to no
instruction in their teacher preparation programs on
identifying and supporting dyslexic students, and this has done real harm to students. Research shows that intensive reading intervention in kindergarten and first grade is most effective in helping struggling readers.

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

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

And more importantly, we built a great partnership with his special education teacher, who
after my son's diagnosis has invested her time and effort in building her expertise around this issue. But not every family has the means to pay for tutors, and not every school is investing in training for their teachers.

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your testimony. Okay great. With that I will turn to our next panel which I'll call now. Sarah Spreitzer, Jennifer Hausfeld, Christina Robbins, Claire Sontag and Tilman Wuerschmidt. I'm sorry if I got any of those names wrong. So we'll start first with Sarah
MS. SPREITZER: Thank you. Hello, my name is Sarah Spreitzer, and I am a resident of Ward 4, and the mother of two DCPS students. I am testifying on behalf of my daughter Leila, and as a member of the Decoding Dyslexia group. I am a long-time resident of D.C. and my husband I are committed to raising our children in the city.

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

My daughter Leila is eight years old and a third grader at Lafayette Elementary School. Overall DCPS has been a very good experience for our family. However, about three years ago my daughter started demonstrating issues with learning how to read. For our older son, reading came naturally. He moved
easily from board books to learning the alphabet, to reading level A to Z. Our daughter Leila, however, is a different story.

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

She scored incredibly low on phonemic awareness and phonics, with scores slightly higher on reading comprehension because she had learned to fake her way through figuring out the text. This allowed DCPS to say that she was at grade level. The school continued to pull her out of class for additional support, but none of that seemed to help, and only served to frustrate Leila more because it wasn't the specialized instruction she really needed.
Finally, her first grade teacher told us that she suspected something else was going on since Leila could learn and so desperately wanted to learn, but for some reason had a type of roadblock. But the teacher didn't have a name for it, or really any sense of where we should start addressing it. We asked the school for an assessment and they only assessed her in the two areas -- reading comprehension and an IQ test. Neither of which were her areas of suspected disability.

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

We are extremely lucky that we had the ability to spend the additional dollars and time to support her. While Leila was diagnosed early, that is not the norm. The addressing Dyslexia and Other
Reading Difficulties Act of 2020 requires programs and changes that would address some of the most problematic issues that our family had to deal with including universal screening and professional development for K to 2 teachers, awareness training for all teachers on dyslexia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In FY22 please continue more intensive training on interpreting Dibels' scores and its connection to dyslexia and reading difficulty, so
struggling readers are identified early. Not all teacher recognize Dibels as a tool to screen for dyslexia. Expand upon and continue dyslexia training and the science of reading training that were held last June and in addition to K-2 teachers, require it for reading specialists and reading education and special education teachers.

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

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

Children with reading difficulty, such as
dyslexia, who aren't identified or remediated, have higher rates of drop out, unemployment, anxiety and depression. A 2000 study estimates that 50 percent of prison inmates have dyslexia. The percentage of students who experience reading failure, and the deep academic and emotional consequences due to that failure can be tremendously reduced.

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

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

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

I'm here today to ask you for your help. While our school family, staff and administration have worked to improve test scores by double digits, build a strong PTO and create a safe and loving
environment where students can thrive. We have significant financial concerns outside of our control. First, we are in desperate need of a full facility modernization. Built in the 1920's Langley was constructed to be a middle school.

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

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

We need a modern HVAC system. We have
radiators and window units. The system is not properly maintained, and rooms are either extremely hot, or extremely cold. Pipes burst and have flooded rooms, damaging school supplies and furniture in an already strapped Title I school.

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

These facility upgrades are not just nice to have, they are necessary to ensure that our school is safe and properly functioning. Second, funding for students with special needs. One out of every three of our students has an IEP. Half of our kids are considered at-risk. As long as contained classrooms exist at Langley, the position of directors specialized instruction, needs to be a permanent position, and all staff need to be trained on the needs of these students.
The EES and CS classrooms enrollment rises from the middle to the end of the year. Funding must follow the students. If those with the highest needs don't have what they need to succeed the whole school suffers.

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

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

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

MS. SUNTAG: Hi thank you. My name is
Claire Suntag and I'm speaking today in support of the Reading and Dyslexia Bill, the 230150. I was an elementary school teacher in Title I schools for 20 years with 11 years in DCPS until I resigned in the Spring of 2019.

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

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

The school where I worked most recently had invested heavily in reading recovery, which is a modified whole language approach to teaching reading.
When discussing a student who had shown no progress after completing the program, I suggested that perhaps the student could have dyslexia.

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

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

During my time in DCPS I regularly had second graders who did not know letter names or
sounds, and would never have been taught these
crucial basic building blocks of learning to read if
I hadn't done so. Teachers don't know that knowing
letter sounds is important for learning to read. I
am now voluntarily tutoring a DCPS third grader.
He's reading at the Kindergarten level.

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

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

But these children do not deserve to be
casualties of administrator and teachers
unfamiliarity with how the brain acquires reading.
If this bill were passed, far fewer students would be saddled with a life of humiliation, depression and struggle, unable to capitalize on their many strengths and reach their full potential when it could have been so easily avoided by arming their teachers on teaching reading. Thank you.

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your time.

Our next speaker will be Tilman Wuerschmidt.

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

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

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

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

Another important factor in setting inadequate funding levels is budget transparency. Specifically, at-risk funding should go to services
for at-risk students and not help fill in gaps in the general school budgets.

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

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

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

MR. CAUDILLO: Thank you and good evening. Thank you so much Chancellor and all the DCPS budget staff. We appreciate you all listening to us this evening. My name is Emmanuel Caudillo and I serve as
a member of the Regional Strategy Team of the D.C. Education Coalition for Change.

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

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

And we are working on getting stakeholders to learn about the priorities that we are able to share with you to ensure that our students are able to succeed -- all students are able to succeed in D.C. One area, for instance, is transportation. I want to be sure that in the budget we have funded and ensured our students are able to go to and from
school safely. And not just that, but also you're able to arrive in school on time. And so we're looking for strategies that allows us to have more transportation supply, whether a lot of buses or shuttles that enables our students to get from the D.C. Metro to their school on time, so then they're able to take advantage of all the classroom time.

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

We cannot allow that to happen here. We want to make sure that our at-risk funding is there to provide those additional resources for all our students, for those students that we talked about. Because to us when I see at-risk I see at-promise. And I want to be able to ensure that our students have the opportunity to be prepared for college, to be prepared for the workforce.
It's something that DCPS can fulfill a promise to ensure that all students, no matter where they're from, or no matter where they live, are able to succeed in D.C., so that's one area we're looking for. DEC continues to look forward to working with DCPS and other groups to ensure that we keep that promise to our students in this new normal. We're holding a virtual platform assembly on December 3, we're talking to communities about their educational priorities and we look forward to sharing that with you Chancellor, and the rest of the budget staff on there.

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

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

MS. ERDMANN: Good evening Chancellor Ferebee. My name is Andrew Erdmann, I am the
treasurer of the Tacoma Education Campus Parent Teacher Organization. Like many DCPS schools, Tacoma Education Campus receives Title I resources to help ensure that all students meet challenging academic standards, but the federal resources are not sufficient to provide an equitable educational experience on par with the highest performing schools in the District.

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

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

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

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

This includes hand-washing stations such as commercial sinks with available hand-washing stations for children and staff to wash their hands before eating. It also includes water bottle filling
stations that will allow for hands free water dispensing.

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

With this testimony we endeavor to hold DCPS accountable to its own mission that every school provides world-class education that prepares all students for success in college, career and life.

Thank you very much.

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

MS. SCHOELL: Hello. I'm Heather. I am the PTO President at Eastern Senior High School and I am in I believe my 50th year advocating on behalf of children and D.C. public schools. And I found that I
have reputed myself year after year. My suggestions are purely to help others and to correct injustices that I've witnessed in these many years. And my hope is that we have the courage to -- and the will, to take advantage of this pause in business as usual to make substantive changes for the betterment of the whole for students now and those in the future.

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

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

If the per pupil allocation is $10,000.00 for example, then you calculate the daily rate and then minus the days that they spent at that school, and the remainder should be an instant
transfer to the next school. This is not only fair, but it may encourage students to schools to work with the student instead of transferring them.

Second, mental health support should be allocated by need and not by school budget. Currently we make the schools with the highest at-risk students and the lowest PTA budgets, spend their academic funds on mental health supports, and this is not an equitable solution.

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

You can improve this situation by putting the correct number of behavioral health people in schools based on need, not based on per pupil allocation. Kids can't learn as well when they're suffering from the trauma of what they've seen or experienced. The healthiest children -- to have the
opportunity to work things out in their minds, in
their psyche so they can be ready to learn. I
worked that out with DBH.

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

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

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

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

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

The uniform per student funding should be
set for each school at the levels needed to ensure
reasonable class sizes, schedules that provide enough
time for teachers to plan and coordinate with other
educators and specialists, and adequate computers and
other supplies.
The 2013 adequacy study provides detailed recommendations and explanations to help take the guess work out of school funding calculations. And we should make sure that we make good use of it.

Unfortunately, it's recommended per pupil funding levels for DCPS schools often have not been met in the past.

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

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

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

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

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

But when we do go back, Whittier still won't have an elevator. Our elevator was in the
small capital plan for this year, but the funding was reprogrammed for other needs. We have two buildings; one was built in 1961 and one in 1926. Both buildings are three stories accessed only by stairs. Teachers have sustained injuries and taken leave because of climbing stairs to their classrooms.

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

We don't even have enough classrooms with bathrooms inside to accommodate the needs of our existing early childhood and special education students. While the elevator is an urgent need, it's a band-aid to the real problem that our buildings are in disrepair. We're not in the capital budget for
modernization until fiscal 2026 when our primary building will be 100 years old.

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

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

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

MS. DONOWA-JONKINS: Good evening Chancellor Ferebee, parents, teachers, educators, friends of students and DCPS. I'm here as a parent
of a child at Walls and I'm looking for three things. One, transparency in how you deal with Walls in terms of our leadership, in terms of our budget, and in terms of how we would include students.

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

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

You have threatened to remove teachers and counselors to do the school reopening which caused children to have a lot of anxiety. Our students already have anxiety from the workload that they
have, and we are proud of the work that they're doing, and they can handle it.

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

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

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

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

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

MS. GASKINS: Thank you for your
testimony. And with that we're going to close. I
will first start out by saying thank you to everybody
for sharing your words tonight and thank you to those
who are listening on a YouTube station. We know how busy your lives are and deeply appreciate you taking the time to join us and for your continued commitment to our schools, our educators and our students during this critical time for them.

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

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

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

We hope everyone continues to remain safe
and healthy during this Thanksgiving break. And at this time we will conclude our hearing. Thank you again.

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