

## Testimony for DCPS budget hearing

November 15, 2023

Elizabeth Stuart (elizabeth.stuart@gmail.com)

Member and parent co-chair, Alice Deal Middle School LSAT; parent, Jackson-Reed High School

Good evening. Thank you for hosting this hearing; my name is Elizabeth Stuart; I am an elected parent member and co-chair of the Alice Deal Middle School LSAT. I am testifying today to highlight a few points related to the DCPS budget planning. In particular, I'm advocating on behalf of all DCPS schools so that all – regardless of their size – can be provided with budgets that allow them to operate effectively, serving all of their students with year to year consistency.

Alice Deal serves 1,391 6th-8th grade students; approximately 15% of all DCPS students in those grades. The next largest school serving those students has approximately 500 students in those grades. Deal is nearly three times the size of the next largest middle school and about five times the size of the average 6th-8th grade middle school. Additionally, Deal serves approximately 140 English language learners and 140 at-risk students – more than the total number of 6th-8th graders at several other DCPS schools. And, Deal serves many students, from all over the District; who travel from across town to attend the school.

There are three key points I want to make today, related to 1) supporting multi-language learners, 2) the need for budget stability year to year, including a ratified teacher contract, and 3) ensuring large schools receive the resources they need.

First, I want to highlight the needs of multi-language learners. While DCPS provides some funding and supports for staff, it is insufficient. Students who are not yet fluent in English sit in classes such as science or social studies, unable to fully participate and engage. This is challenging for the teachers who are aiming to reach every student in their classroom, and to the students put in this position. DCPS needs to carefully consider the comprehensive supports and structures multi-language learners need to succeed.

Second, budget stability is crucial. The supplemental funds received last spring due to council mandated funding was crucial to retain staff in the building, including instructional coaches at each grade level to support the math and ELA instruction happening across each of 5 teams in each grade. However, every year there is a scramble and uncertainty regarding whether those funds will actually come through. This makes it incredibly difficult for teachers and principals and LSATs to plan. Relatedly, there needs to be a ratified teacher contract (which is currently expired) to ensure sufficient planning and avoid unexpected budget implications at the last minute. We are also particularly concerned about the upcoming budget cycle given the previous stability funding line items, which masked dramatic reductions in core funding. Schools, families, and students need consistency of support.

Third, the budget model does not take into account the challenges of large schools. DCPS frequently allocates resources on a per school basis – e.g., a set funding amount for social-emotional programming

or a certain number of substitutes – not accounting for the fact that some schools have 300 students and others have nearly 1500. A recent and very concerning example concerns school nurses – Deal and Jackson-Reed, totaling 3500 students, currently share one nurse; in other clusters schools with fewer than 1000 students total share one nurse. Similarly, Deal is not currently meeting national recommendations for the ratio of mental health and school counselors to students. There are simply not economies of scale that make up for the fact that large schools are complicated organizations that require substantial resources to operate efficiently and well.

Schools across the District need consistent and sufficient budgets that allow them to operate. Without attention to these issues – specifically without an improved budget model that provides core general education funding or more funding to schools – schools, such as Deal, are at grave risk of not being able to provide core services for their students. It will also help schools retain excellent teachers, by reducing extra workload and burnout.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. We look forward to working with the Council and DCPS to ensure students at Deal and across the city receive the resources and attention that they all need and deserve.

**Laura Nerenberg**

**Amidon-Bowen Elementary School**

Chancellor Ferebee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Laura Nerenberg, and I am testifying as an Amidon-Bowen parent, the LSAT co-chair, and a member of the PTA. Tonight, we want to highlight three asks:

1. We need more funding for behavioral supports. We don't have enough resources for it, period. We need more staff and behavioral curriculum.

2. We are also funding a behavior tech for the CES self-contained classroom; not doing so was not an option. But this means that DCPS's self-contained classrooms continue to be an unfunded mandate. Instead of asking, "how can we set up students with disabilities for success?" DCPS is funding the bare minimum. We ask that DCPS fully funds their self-contained classrooms, and stop requiring schools to redirect their limited resources to cover what is considered to be a DCPS-run program.

3. We ask that DCPS works to mitigate the large number of vacant positions by a) being more flexible about the requirements for each position, and b) offering a livable wage in the case of paraprofessionals.

a. We have TWO vacant social worker positions through HillCrest and Department of Behavioral Health. This means there are no social worker supports for students without IEPs (because our school-funded social workers are maxed with the students with IEPs). There was a person in training who was great, but he had a school counselor degree so could not fulfill the position longer term. If there are many vacant positions, such as with social workers, DCPS needs to allow different types of credentialed and appropriate persons to fill these roles so our students don't get shortchanged.

b. In addition to the vacant social worker positions, we also have FOUR vacant positions for paraprofessionals. These vacancies are in part due to the non-livable wage offered to paraprofessionals in DC. We need more people in the building to support students, but we cannot change the salary and job requirements for paraprofessionals. We need DCPS to make this a better job with better pay so we can get people in the building to support our students.

We are encouraged to see the separate funding streams for students classified as "at-risk" and those with IEPs in the new DCPS budget model. But we need DCPS to provide more resources to address the very real behavior needs, as well as make sure that even if a position is funded, it won't remain vacant. Funding is the first step, but it doesn't matter if we can't get people in the building.

Thank you.

**Andrew Pratt**

**Brent Elementary School**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Andrew Pratt. I have a 4th grader and 2nd grader at Brent ES and I am a member of the Brent Equity and Inclusion Group.

Brent is an affluent community and largely white. Given the ongoing racial disparities in our city's education system, I want to speak briefly on the impact of the budgeting process last year on the most marginalized students within our community.

I understand and support the District government goals on equitable budgeting: schools with higher needs should get more. I also know that the current economic climate means looking closely at all agency budgets.

As DCPS begins the budget process for schools, it is my belief that significant budget cuts should not hit schools with stable enrollment and stable populations of English Language Learners and students with IEPs. Brent, like other non-Title I schools, lost the maximum of 5% of last year's budget despite stable enrollment across populations.

Then through the Students First Act, funding was restored by the DC Council. But that funding was restored imperfectly. The Council received inaccurate data about positions at individual schools. These inaccuracies largely worked in the positive for other schools, but not for us. This year, LSATs should get the right to re-check the staff position data to ensure that funding adjustments are made based on accurate staffing information.

Our principal has mapped out another 5% cut for the coming year: the school would lose two special education teachers, and would then have fewer people than required to serve our special education population. This will most impact the kids who have a right to additional services.

In order to ensure that the members of our community who are entitled to specialized services can have access to the right staff, my ask is that DCPS takes steps to ensure more transparency in the budgeting process, with enough time for school-based teams to ensure the accuracy of staffing and budget data. This is necessary to ensure equitable services for all students. Thank you.

## **Jean Strich, Brent Elementary**

I'm Jean Blackerby Strich, a parent to fourth grade and PreK4 students at Brent Elementary School. I'm also co-president of the school's PTA. Thank you for the chance to testify today. I agree with the previous Brent Elementary commenter, Andrew Pratt, and first want to echo the views he expressed, including Brent's commitment to equity in and through the budgeting process.

Our school community supports the drive to deliver equity through budgeting throughout DCPS and within our own school. Given the challenges we experienced in last year's budget cycle, our school community has two major concerns – raised by Andrew earlier. First, we are concerned about the impact of what seems to be an assumption that non-Title I schools will be able to handle 5% cuts year after year in order to allow for increases at other schools. In reality, we can't account for that heavy of a reduction without it negatively affecting the students who need the most support within our school. Second, we are troubled by the lack of transparency in numerous facets of the budget process (including initial budgeting, the petition process and the restoration of funds last year through the *Students First Act*). The lack of transparency was detrimental to our school and we believe it has had a negative impact across the board.

Regarding the impact of 5% cuts –

Our principal looked into what would need to take place if we received another 5% cut. The most likely scenarios include:

- The loss of two special education teachers, leaving us with fewer people than required to serve our school's special needs population.
- The loss of Kindergarten partner teachers, leaving us with less staff than we need during a critical period when a large number of students from outside our school's boundary lottery in and join our school community, resulting in our school's largest class sizes.

Again, our passion for equity extends among school communities as well as within our own school community. When we map out the impact, it can't occur without hurting the kids in our school with the greatest need.

Secondly, we feel strongly that last year's budget process lacked transparency, and our school in particular was harmed by that lack of transparency. Brianna Erickson, a fellow Brent parent and representative of the Brent LSAT, will speak further regarding the lack of transparency and its impact in the budget process last year. We would like to see the budget process improve for the sake of all schools and the students they serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening.

**Brianna Erickson**

**Brent ES**

Thanks for the opportunity to testify this evening. My name is Brianna Erickson, I'm the parent of a fourth-grader and kindergartener at Brent Elementary School as well as a future DCPS student. I'm also a member of Brent Elementary's LSAT.

I agree with the previous testifiers Andrew and Jean on our commitment to equity within DCPS and within our school community and want to echo the perspective that increased budgets for schools with the greatest needs should not automatically mean that schools like Brent experience the greatest losses despite having stable ELL and Special Education populations.

Like many other schools, if our city's economic situation leads our school's budget to be cut 5% again in the FY2025 budget cycle, we've looked at various scenarios and we expect we'd need to cut two special education teachers. We are now at the point where we do not have excess staff - we would have to cut essential services, having fewer teachers than required to serve our students with the greatest need, like English Language Learners and students with IEPs.

Looking ahead to the 2025 budget cycle, we also ask to see remedied several process and transparency issues we experienced during the FY24 cycle. Now that the Students First Act has been in place for a while, we're looking for transparency in how it's implemented for FY25 budgeting.

First, we need a clearly defined and transparently executed petition process. Schools need equal opportunity during the petition process for the restoration of funds.

Second, LSATs need a chance to review position data prior to budget allocations, as last year the Council received inaccurate data about positions, not just at Brent but we heard this confirmed by other LSATs. For example, positions being restored did not exist.

Third, school communities need accurate budget narratives from the very beginning of the process. Last year, each line in ours was inaccurate. Historically, those narratives could be counted on as the "why" behind budget changes.

And, lastly, we'd look for the inclusion of WTU teacher salary increases to be reflected in the budget and for the salary + benefits number for a Teacher FTE used in our DCPS budgets to match those in the Council's formulas and budgets.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to speak this evening.

DCPS FY25 Budget Hearing  
November 14, 2023  
Cathy Reilly

I appreciate this opportunity to testify and give input into your budget process. It is a vital and precious part of being a democratic public education institution. I facilitate monthly meetings for SHAPPE, C4DC and the Ward 4 Education Alliance

DCPS juggles the needs and desires of each family then each school community in the context of being a system. The right balance is important and difficult to achieve. As a system DCPS has strengths and flexibility as well as constraints, we hope this is one step in a collaborative process on the budgets.

Today, the DC Policy Center noted that the coming year for DCPS is going to be very challenging. The percentage of the budget that is UPSFF is less as the COVID and other funds supplementing it will be reduced. When this goes away, as a system DCPS with your communities will need to prioritize, look for other resources and efficiently employ what we have.

These are the top areas I hear about: I can supplement later with more detail.

#### Stability

- 1- Work to avoid what is perceived and understood to be a budget shortfall in schools with initial and final school budgets. The instability of losing staff and then getting a windfall has been stressful. While additional funds have been welcome, the cost of this way of operating has been substantial. There was a day when DCPS and its communities went to the Council together.
- 2- Swing Space – this is a cost of so many buildings from the DCPS inventory being gone. However the need to continue to work with Whittier, Burroughs and the other communities looking at commutes that will challenge their families and may prompt them to leave – is crucial.
- 3- Reduce turnover, support and nurture relationships. This builds energy and community, helps with mental health challenges of everyone. Strengthen the connections between feeder schools. Consider and support recommendations of EmpowerEd.

#### Equity

- 4- Digital Equity: We support the recommendations that Digital Equity will share with you.
- 5- As a system, work with more collaboration between schools, the city's resources to provide strong programming, dual language, arts, music and rich exposure. XQ has given this to some high schools, we can learn what is working and extend some of this to all.

#### Safety

- 6- In a few weeks students will be told they cannot return to school unless they are up to date with their immunizations. The Nursing cluster model being implemented citywide by the Dept of Health contract with Children's has continued a reduction of coverage in many schools. There is not consistent personnel in each school. While DCPS does not control this, your voice and support for a model that better serves your constituents is vital.

- 7- Thank you to school staff that move outside after school to support safe passage – the safe passage workers are helping – keep working with city agencies.
- 8- Continue work with DGS and Council on functional doors, locks and PA Systems
- 9- Continued proactive mental health and restorative justice supports as well as stable relationships within the school.

Thank you,



## DCPS Budget Hearing Testimony November 2023

### Grace Hu, Digital Equity in DC Education



Good evening. My name is Grace Hu and I am one of the parent co-leads of [Digital Equity in DC Education](#), a city-wide coalition of parents working to close the digital divide and to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> century education for our children.

For the past five years, our parent group has continuously engaged with DCPS on technology needs, and the school system has experienced significant improvements in technology infrastructure, including a policy for a 1:1 student-device ratio in grades 3-12 and a device for every teacher, more robust devices for students in Career and Technical Education academies across the city, improved internet speeds in our largest school buildings, and an in-process technology refresh of classroom Smartboards. These investments are significant and appropriate if we are to equip students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills they need for college and careers.

For the FY25 DCPS budget, we ask that you:

- Continue to meet the Mayor's commitment to provide an appropriate device for every student in grades 3-12, including funding the refresh of outdated devices in a predictable schedule;
- Reconsider how you allocate funds to local school budgets for other technology needs that are not currently centrally funded, such as replacement parts for laptops (e.g., chargers) and computers for administrative (non-WTU) staff; and
- Provide more support for school-level asset management, which continues to be a barrier to effective technology management and use at schools.

### **Funding to Refresh Technology Must be Stable & Predictable**

Technology costs, including to pay for replacement of old devices and Smartboards, are known costs that are largely predictable from year to year. Despite this, there is no stable funding for technology refresh, as reflected in the last-minute decision last summer to cancel procurement of devices to replace the first-generation Microsoft Surface Go's due to lack of funding. Not only does this lack of stability directly impact schools' abilities to support day-to-day learning, it runs counter to the Mayor's commitment to provide a 1:1 student-device ratio for all students in grades 3-12. Parents should not have to advocate year after year for funding to maintain functional, appropriate technology, which is now a must-have for a 21st century education and needed for online assessments and curricula that DCPS Central requires of schools.

The refresh of technology should automatically be baked into DCPS's operating budget every year.

[Each quote was provided in October and is from a different school.]

*"We do not have enough devices available for classroom instruction and definitely don't have enough devices available for whole-school testing. This is the worst condition that I've ever seen in regards to student technology as the devices being used are from the Covid era and need to be replaced." – DCPS middle school*

*"We still don't have a device for every student. Not to mention when the devices don't work." –DCPS middle school*

*"Not enough devices for students. I teach a computer class and didn't have devices until a month into the semester. Right now I share a computer cart with other teachers. Priority is given to math and science teachers." –DCPS middle school*

*"We need consistency. Consistent working technology, consistent internet. This district requires more consistency." –DCPS elementary school*

## **Local School Budgets Do Not Fully Support Technology Purchasing**

Under the current DCPS budget framework, schools remain responsible for purchasing technology for the following:

- Computers for school staff who are not teachers
- Replacement chargers for laptops, headphones, and other accessories
- Printers and ink cartridges
- Computers and other IT for computer labs/media centers

This continues to place burdens on school budgets, with the result being that students use outdated equipment or cannot fully use the equipment they do have. This year, one DCPS middle school resorted to using Donorschoose.org to raise more than \$6,000 for laptop chargers; otherwise they would have had to distribute laptops with no chargers. One ward 8 middle school told us that one school year ago, only about half of their devices had working chargers so a teacher had to arrive at school around 7 am every day to change the chargers to the other half of their devices.

The workarounds that schools make due to lack of adequate funding for laptop parts/accessories causes significant disruption and frustration for school staff whose attention should be focused on teaching, not managing technology challenges.

*“Theoretically DCPS believes we have enough devices- but we do not have enough working chargers and keyboards to have enough functional devices and it would be an equity issue to say “oh this kid gets a keyboard and charger but you don’t.” The keyboards and chargers are no longer under warranty for the old surfaces, DCPS sent us 2 carts of Lenovos for this school year BUT a) that wasn’t enough to bring us to 1:1 with functional devices and b) the charging carts they came with were defective so even though the new devices are great we had a Frankenstein a charging solution for them using an older cart. Right now we are using a cart based model in classrooms.”*  
– DCPS middle school

*“The consequences of lost, stolen, or damaged chargers are numerous. It usually means that students are unable to use their device causing them to fall behind. They miss precious time to work in class because they don’t have a charged device, and they also miss the opportunity to work at home on their device. Also, many of our students come from low-income households, and replacing a new charger either causes hardship or families do not have the technical know-how to purchase the appropriate charger.”*  
–DCPS middle school

## **Support for School-Level Asset Management Still Inadequate**

IT asset management continues to be a significant challenge for schools and has real impacts on learning. Schools continue to struggle with keeping their school IT inventories updated. Since DCPS relies on the school inventories to determine the number of computers to provide to schools, outdated school inventories led to delays in Central Office provision of the correct number of student devices. We still do not understand why DCPS has not provided additional asset management support to schools, including requesting that OCTO provide more support to schools in this area. Until we address challenges with asset management and IT support, we will not be maximizing the use of our technology assets to provide a seamless teaching and learning experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**Testimony of:** Scott Goldstein, Executive Director, EmpowerEd

**Before:** DC Public Schools

**Date of Testimony:** November 14, 2023

**Topic:** The FY 2025 DCPS Budget

Good Evening,

Thank you for listening to the community's priorities for the Fiscal Year 2023 DCPS budget this evening. My name is Scott Goldstein. I am a DCPS parent, former DCPS teacher and the Executive Director of the DC teacher organization EmpowerEd. EmpowerEd works with DCPS schools to support schools with educator wellness and retention and also organizes DC educators, including DCPS educators in every Ward and across dozens of DCPS schools to set priorities for systemic change each year. In that process we center the voices of a representative group of educators representing every ward, race, grade level, subject taught, level of experience and more. And given our deep partnerships over the years with many DCPS schools, we are also regularly in touch with school leaders and hearing their needs. This puts us in a great position to assess some of the deepest inequities in student experience, educator experience and family experiences that help us determine what needs fighting for each year. So in that context, I present a few critical priorities. While our testimony focused on strengthening the system, all of these priorities must follow an across the board, **full funding of every DCPS school, including higher at-risk concentration funding.**

First, to strengthen the recruitment, support and retention of our educators, **we ask that you strategically work to bolster the teacher induction and mentoring program.** Currently, DCPS teacher induction is significantly weaker than many counter-parts throughout the country. All DC educators should start with a strong foundational knowledge of high-expertise teaching that represents a shared vision and pedagogical approach across schools while entrusting educators with the professional autonomy and respect to do their jobs. Something that can only be achieved if we also **de-emphasize testing** and **allow educators the time and space** to do the things we've asked of them well. **We ask that you make a significant investment in permanent substitutes for schools to ensure that every single school has at least one full-time permanent substitute per 300 students. Next, DCPS should invest in win-win solutions like flexible scheduling.** Flexible scheduling models allow educators more time to plan, collaborate *and* to protect their own wellbeing and work-life balance while dramatically enriching and personalizing the student experience. *We ask that you not only invest in this- but*

*truly allow school leaders and staff to design the models themselves.* If you truly believe educator wellness supports student wellness- these models cannot only be about more time for collective planning or data analysis- they have to give teachers the time back and trust them with it. DCPS is now legally obligated to present this option to school leaders and fund at least six schools this year, but that *funding should be deepened with DCPS' 'own budget based on the demand from your outreach to schools.* **We also ask that you learn the lessons of the pandemic and set a policy and ensure the new teacher contract includes no fewer than 2 explicit mental health days on top of sick leave.**

We are also asking that you enrich the student experience through three critical investments- an expansion of the DCPS Connected Schools model to every DCPS middle school this budget year, and expansion of the dual language and global studies models and the creation of a city-wide experiential learning fund.

First, DCPS knows that **the Community Schools model works** and DCPS has invested in bringing this holistic support to every Ward 7 and 8 middle school. **Now it's time to bring it first to every single DCPS middle school and then to all schools with the highest at-risk populations.** DC is well behind much of the country in this area, including the state of Maryland and Baltimore schools- and this budget should make a significant investment here.

Second, the city heard consistently through the student assignment town halls that **the community is demanding an expansion of the dual language model and to do so equitably throughout the city and by ensuring inclusion in participation within each participating school. We also believe the popular and future-focused global studies theme at existing schools should be expanded** as we think about re-imagining the high school experience and graduation requirements. Both of these should be accompanied by budget investments in curriculum development support for schools- especially at dual language schools.

Finally, we believe we can bridge parent and community funding inequities, enhance student experiences and improve attendance **by establishing a city-wide Experiential Learning Micro-Grant Fund that any educator can apply to and be provided timely funding to bring experiential, project-based and field-based learning to life for the students they serve.** As of this month, November of 2023, DC educators had a total of \$408,000 outstanding Donors Choose requests, not including funding requests through parent organizations, Kickstarter campaigns and other sources. Educators should not be dependent on PTO funding or spending their limited time fundraising through Donors Choose to provide rich academic experiences including cross-curricular and real-world experiences. And these experiences, ones that both improve student learning and student attendance, shouldn't be limited to students in the wealthiest school communities.

We must also focus on enhancing supports for our students with disabilities, English language learners and doing everything in our power to enhance school-based behavioral health.

These investments, on top of the full-funding of every school above its 2024 funding levels, will make a critical difference for our students. Thank you.

## **Geronimo Robinson**

### **Hardy MS**

Good evening everyone. My name is Geronimo Robinson, President of the Hardy Middle School PTO.

Hardy MS has the second-lowest per-pupil non-personnel allocation across all DCPS middle schools while simultaneously having the second-highest number of students per GE & RA teacher. No other DCPS middle school compares. This is only possible because Hardy's per-pupil total funding allocation is just 64% of the DCPS middle school average. One of my colleagues, Troy Kravitz has put together this data to show the inequity and inadequate funding that has plagued this school for several years now.

We have asked that DCPS look at repurposing unspent funds from FY2023 to Hardy to help fill the school's needs. Since so many items that we seek funding for appear to be essential, I am confused about the need for the PTO to continue advocating for these necessities. But given the urgency of need, here is a list of the items the school would fund:

- Custodial Supplies: \$49k (invoice from DCPS distributor attached)
- Musical Instruments (repair and procure): \$25k
- Educational Supplies (lab equipment, books for ELA, math manipulatives, AED for health units, etc.): \$35k
- Office Supplies (ink, paper, printers, labels, envelopes, etc.): \$22k
- Intervention Programming for Special Education: \$7k
- Furniture: \$30k
- Sports Uniforms: \$25k
- Printing (behavioral expectations posters, community newsletters): \$10k

The needs of the Hardy School are many, the resources currently in place few.

In addition, there is a serious need for campus security since the gates to the surrounding the walkways are open and members of the public frequently appear in the middle of the school grounds during the school day. While this is always a security risk, it is particularly problematic when students are exiting and entering the building en masse during lunch, recess, and PE.

Ideally, an additional amount of funding would be provided to install security gates on the 34th Street and 35th Street entrances to campus. (The cost of these security gates has not yet been estimated.) Waiting for DGS to address this safety need seems reckless.

We hope that any and all funds not all ready allocated this current year can be reallocated to be used to help increase the funds needed for the Hardy school to pay for the list of items mentioned in this testimony. Time is of the essence.

## **Testimony of Caroline Mehta**

### **DCPS Budget Hearing, 11/14/2023**

I am here today as the parent of a junior at Jackson-Reed High School and as a part of a group of Jackson-Reed parents whose children are engaged in and passionate about theater.

Last year, after many years of calling attention to the state of the Jackson-Reed auditorium, and with the support of multiple constituencies making the case directly to the Council, Jackson-Reed and other schools received desperately needed funds to repair the auditorium. Those funds became available at the start of the Fiscal Year, October 1.

Here we are, going into Thanksgiving Week, and just this week DGS visited to begin the process of assessing the situation. The theater has been shuttered since the end of spring of 2022. We are well into our second academic year without an auditorium. Many months ago, our former director, Karen Harris, offered up the name of reliable and affordable third parties who could complete an assessment quickly and efficiently. One gave an estimate of \$600.

We shouldn't be talking assessments at this phase, we should have a plan for contracting for the necessary equipment and completing the repairs.

Instead, at the largest high school in DCPS – attended by some 2,000 students from every ward in the city – a decrepit auditorium sits dark and locked, while students who gain so much of their socialization, engagement and self-esteem from the arts continue to be disregarded. The impact is not just to theater, but to the ability to host assemblies, choir concerts, band concerts, orchestra concerts, and on and on. Without lights, these events are held in other parts of the building that frankly have terrible acoustics.

The money is sitting there. Why do we have no progress to show at this point?

Every day wasted is in effect a cut to arts programming. Jackson-Reed Theater has in years past staged Broadway-worthy musicals in the spring. It was unimaginable to us that once the funds were in place we might be facing yet another full year without being able to host that musical in the auditorium.

Instead, Mr. Iawanec has done his best to host plays in the small Black Box theater – and while he has been heroic and creative to make anything happen at all – that means a fraction of the students get to be in the cast and crew. It means the dozens of students who a few years ago learned and played the entire score to Les Miserables don't get to be part of the musical – there's simply no room. It means a self-sustaining theater program can only sell about 150 tickets per show to the community, as opposed to the 800-plus seats in the auditorium. It means another class of seniors may miss the ritual of kissing the stage in gratitude for all that theater has meant to their time at Jackson-Reed.

To use the auditorium for the spring musical, these fixes NEED to be done by March. Right now, DCPS COO Mr. Ross has offered no timeline or details when asked.



What are we telling our kids and our community here? That you can mobilize, advocate, make your case to the DC Council successfully, but good luck getting DCPS and DGS to capably get the work done.

Our optimism has frankly given way to anger. Two entire classes of students have never set foot in the auditorium of the largest high school in the District. If DCPS is not ashamed of that, it should be.

## TESTIMONY BEFORE DCPS ON THE BUDGET

Elizabeth Callanan Mitchell

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

My name is Elizabeth Mitchell. I have been on the Janney LSAT for three years and my testimony reflects my experiences there as well as conversations with students, staff, teachers, and community members across the city.

My child's school is slated to lose millions of dollars over the next few years. We will have to cut teachers and programming year after year and it will deeply impact our ability to meet our students' needs and we will have no hope of helping our most vulnerable students. These cuts seem to have no connection to enrollment or need or to be tied to any sort of sensible metric.

Our school is not alone in this. When we look at budgets across the city, we see the same thing—DCPS is slashing funding rather than helping schools build back as we continue to recover from the ravages of the pandemic. Council certainly discussed those issues and the MASSIVE fiscal cliff you're pushing us over during today's hearing so instead I'll discuss the issues with the budget process from the LSAT perspective since it's something you have complete control over and can actually fix before you leave the room tonight.

**First, give us the time we are supposed to have with these budgets.** We are supposed to have WEEKS not days. If you can't give us the weeks we are legally owed, then let us tell YOU what money we need before so we can start the work ahead of time. You might not be ready but we are and we know what our schools need. Let us give you our number before you tell us what the Mayor has decided our number should be.

Forcing parents and teachers to sit for a surprise budget final exam in the TWO days before winter break is not only cruel and unusual but also inequitable. Not every parent and teacher has the time or ability to drop everything else and do a deep dive into these budgets and turn around with useful feedback in less than 48 hours when we all have full time jobs and full time lives.

**Second, give our Principals the ability to ask for what they need.**

You told our Principals what they were 'allowed' to ask for last year. In doing so, you take an invaluable communication tool away from every single school across the city. This process is supposed to be collaborative and a moment for YOU to hear from us about what our needs are. Instead, that conversation is shut down before it happens and we're forced to cut programs we actually need with ZERO opportunity to truly appeal. We were supposed to be able to add notes and context but those comment boxes didn't work. Most people left the process not only

feeling used and abused but completely disrespected.

**Third, give us the information we NEED to achieve the best budgets possible.** This happens so often it has to be intentional. Give us information in an easily accessible and sharable format. Make it consistent. We only had two days but spent about half that time trying not only trying to navigate an incoherent system but also trying to cross reference everything we were given with the information we had so we could ensure we were all on the same page. Total waste of time.

**Fourth, fully fund our schools.** Start fighting for us rather than against us. This is not the city of my youth. We are RICH. There is NO reason our public schools should be denied any reasonable budget requests. We have the ability and capacity to fully fund public schools but we are choosing not to.

The Mayor has all of the power and I understand that you work for and report to her...but you are also supposed to be working for us and WITH us.

Instead you have set up a completely chaotic and adversarial budget process that not only leaves students and communities behind but seems to engrain and enshrine the inequity you were seeking to alleviate.

Fix it. Fix it now. Fix it before the mad February budget rush so we can actually work with you to get what we all need rather than

fighting against each other for scraps.

Testimony of Sheila Bunn  
Co-President, Jefferson Middle School Academy Family/Teacher Organization  
DCPS FY25 Public Budget Hearing  
November 14, 2023

Good evening, Chancellor Ferebee and other DCPS members. Thank you for hosting this hearing. I am Sheila Bunn. As a parent of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Jefferson Middle School Academy, I am here to share testimony that focuses on several key advocacy themes, including technology and facility upgrades. A product myself of DC public schools, I believe that strong public schools are essential in making us all better citizens of the city and can be a force for community engagement and greater integration across the city.

That being said, I want to express my strong support for increased funding for all of our middle schools, Jefferson in particular, as well as our Title I schools that serve populations with greater needs. As a parent, co-president of the Jefferson Family/Teacher Organization and Jefferson LSAT member, I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that adequate resources can have on our students' education and overall school environment.

Jefferson Middle School Academy has a proud tradition of academic excellence and a commitment to fostering a loving, nurturing, and inclusive learning environment. However, like many of our middle schools, we face ongoing challenges that require sustained financial support from central office. The allocation of additional funds would directly contribute to the following crucial areas within our middle schools:

1. **Enhanced Educational Programs:** Increased funding would allow Jefferson and other middle schools to expand and improve their educational programs. This includes investing in innovative teaching methods like iReady Math & Reading, expanding programming to include dual language or language immersion, updating curriculum materials, and providing professional development opportunities for teachers to stay current with best practices.
2. **Technology Infrastructure:** In today's digital age, access to up-to-date technology is essential for students' academic success. Additional funding would enable Jefferson and other middle schools to invest in modernizing its technology infrastructure, ensuring that students have access to the tools and resources necessary for 21st-century learning, i.e. 1:1 computers for students. Specifically, we need devices that are big enough for students to actually type on efficiently, that are durable, and that have enough memory and processing speed to start up in a reasonable amount of time and run the programs students need without delays.
3. **Extracurricular Activities:** Extracurricular activities play a vital role in shaping well-rounded individuals. With increased funding, Jefferson and other middle schools can offer a broader range of extracurricular activities, such as sports, arts, and clubs, providing students with opportunities for personal growth and skill development outside the classroom.

4. **Facility Upgrades:** A safe and conducive learning environment is essential for students' well-being. Now that many buildings, including Jefferson, have been modernized, it is imperative that DCPS properly fund each school so that necessary facility maintenance, repairs, and improvements occur without fail in order to contribute to the overall quality of the school environment. As an example, at Jefferson, several of our students don't have lockers because about 25 of them have been broken since last school year.
5. **Support Services:** Additional funding would enable Jefferson and other middle schools to greater invest in support services such as counseling, special education resources, and academic assistance programs. This ensures that all students, regardless of their individual needs, receive the attention and support required for success.

In conclusion, improved support of all of our middle schools, Jefferson in particular, as well as our Title I schools that serve populations with greater needs, is an investment in the future of our community. Adequate funding is crucial to maintaining high standards of education and providing our students with the opportunities they deserve. I urge you to consider the long-term benefits that increased funding would bring to our middle schools and, by extension, to the community as a whole.

Thank you for your time, dedication, and commitment to the education of our students. I trust that you will make the best decision for the future of Jefferson Middle School Academy.

Sincerely,  
Sheila Bunn

**Dorie Nolt**

**Langley ES**

Good evening. I'm Dorie Turner Nolt and I am the parent of a first grade student at Langley Elementary. My son started there in pre-K 3, so this is our fourth year at Langley.

We love Langley because it's a neighborhood school, which means my son's best friends and classmates live just blocks from us. The teachers and administrators at Langley work hard every day to make sure my son and his classmates feel loved and accepted. He loves the music room, his STEM classes and the school garden.

Langley is a school on the rise. We are a Title 1 school serving a high percentage of special needs students. More than half of our students are considered at-risk and 9% experience homelessness. And yet, we've made huge leaps forward in the last few years because of our staff.

Unfortunately, the school building does not reflect the amazing teaching and learning that happens every day. Our building was supposed to be modernized in 2018, but the PACE Act pushed us down the modernization list by more than a decade. The equity that PACE brought to many schools worked against Langley and our largely at-risk student population. As it is, my child will never see modernization while he attends Langley.

Modernization for Langley should be moved up. Our building is in need of major repairs and our students shouldn't have to wait any longer to get the facility they deserve. When we do begin modernization, we hope that Langley will be able to move around the corner to swing space in the Emery building. It is the least disruptive space for our school community, the vast majority of which lives in the neighborhoods around the school. Many of our families walk or bike to school, so moving Langley out of the neighborhood would be a big strain on our school community.

We are grateful that DCPS is finally replacing our ancient HVAC system, but the installation is months over deadline. It was supposed to be done in August, and we have no timeline for when it's going to be complete. This winter, our school will be heated by a temporary boiler installed externally on the building because the new system isn't functional. As you might have seen, we are supposed to have the coldest and snowiest winter in 5 years. What happens if our temporary boiler breaks? The school no longer has radiators that we can use to ensure our classrooms stay warm. We need a date for when this project will be done. Our school leadership has asked repeatedly and has gotten no answers.

This brings me to a larger issue: we need more transparency into how DCPS prioritizes school facilities work orders. Work orders go into the DGS system, but information does not come out about when or if they will be fulfilled and why some projects are prioritized over others. Some work orders sit for months or even years and require frequent and frantic calls from our administrators to get any attention. Parents have to take time out of our work days to email and call DCPS, DGS, and Council members to get attention for emergency repairs like a broken front door or broken heat.

Parents should NOT have to spend our time begging for basic maintenance of our childrens' school building. We should not have to publicly shame DCPS to get repairs done. We have many other things we



can be doing with our time to support our school community. We need city officials to listen to our school staff when they say they need something fixed urgently, because they are in the buildings each day and know the needs of students and educators.

My final request is that DCPS find a way to continue funding key support positions like our Connected Schools manager and our high-impact tutoring manager. Both have been funded outside our local school budget, but that money ends this year. That means we will have to find a way to pay for them from the school budget moving forward. In tutoring, our students get the extra

**Allison Fitzsimmons**

**Murch Elementary School**

Dear Councilmembers,

As a member of the DCPS Murch Elementary LSAT, we request that our school's overall funding be at least maintained for the 2023-2024 school year.

Last year, Murch Elementary graciously received a one-time allocation of funds to address an unexpected, significant, mid school-year increase in enrollment that was not accounted for in the initial calculation of the school budget formula. This allocation allowed Murch to hire two additional teachers which relieved overcrowding in the current 1st and 2nd grades and brought the teacher to student ratio from about 1:27 down to about 1:22. While this ratio is still greater than the ratio in the Washington Teacher's Union contract, it has been significant in improving classroom conditions.

We are asking that the Council make our one-time allocation of \$230,000 (budgeted amount for two teachers) permanent in our school budget for the 2023-2024 school year. This would simply maintain the current funding level for our school.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Allison Fitzsimmons

Co-Chair of Murch Elementary LSAT

**Emily Blake**

**Murch ES**

Dear Councilmembers,

As the Parent Representative Co-Chair Member of the DCPS Murch Elementary LSAT, I request on behalf of our LSAT team and the school community that our school's overall funding be at least maintained for the 2024-2025 school year.

We are asking that the Council make our one-time allocation of \$230,000 (budgeted amount for two teachers) given last year be made permanent in our school budget for the 2024-2025 school year. This would simply maintain the current funding level for our school and would reflect teacher hires and salary adjustments in line with enrollment for our school to prevent cases of overcrowded classrooms and understaffing issues. The enrollment of our school becomes clearer as we move towards June; which is the pattern of our school. We ask this to ensure a teacher to student ratio at the appropriate level for student achievement and in support of teacher performance, which we recommend student teacher ratio to be in line with the ratios given in the Washington Teacher's Union contract, and not to exceed it. Our school will need to have the current budget allocations as students move up in grades and sizes of grade cohorts fluctuate, we want to ensure that teacher to student ratios per grade be maintained by WTU standards, and not exceed.

Once again, we ask that the DCPS Budget team and the Council make our one-time allocation of \$230,000 (budgeted amount for two teachers) permanent in our school budget for the 2024-2025 school year and ensure that our classrooms are at ratios where all students and teachers can succeed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm Regards,  
Emily Blake

**Marine Korin**

**Murch ES**

Testimony for the DCPS FY25 Public Budget Hearing.

As the Parent Representative Secretary of the DCPS Murch Elementary LSAT, I understand the macro pressures that will impact DCPS overall budget for SY24-25. As DCPS crafts its SY24-25 budget guiding principles, our current main request is to ensure that our budget reflects our enrollment pattern on a grade-level basis, ensuring that no grade ends up with class sizes that would not be manageable for one single teacher. While we were grateful that DCPS allocated a one-time grant for two additional teachers for grades 1 and 2 this year, we anticipate that similar additional funds will be necessary to keep class sizes to a reasonable level in the SY24-25. In the coming months, we will be gathering further input from our school community ahead of the budget timeline to further inform our priorities for SY24-25.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warm Regards,

Marine Korin

## **DC Public Schools FY25 Budget Testimony:**

**Laura Fuchs, Teacher, HD Woodson HS,**

Leadership: HD Woodson WTU Building Representative, WTU Secretary, Co-Chair of the DC Caucus of Rank and File Educators (DC-CORE), Executive Board Member of Empower DC and member of LSAT of HD Woodson HS, Ward 5 Resident

**Delivered: Tuesday, November 14, 2023**

My name is Laura Fuchs, and I am in my 17<sup>th</sup> year teaching at HD Woodson HS. Today I am here to testify solely as myself regarding the need to truly and systemically plan for our budgets as a school system. As many have said before, it is almost impossible to plan for long-term sustained investments in our schools because plans come and go. I have several elements we need to take into consideration to combat this.

### **Challenge: WTU Contracts expire and DCPS does not show up to negotiate in good faith.**

Once again, we see the endless pattern under Mayoral Control of a contract expiring without any negotiation timeline in sight. In my 17-year teaching career, *12 of those years have been on expired contracts. I did the math, and that is over 70% of my teaching career.* This makes it difficult for the DC Council to properly fund our school system so that those costs can be accounted for up front when it comes to calculate how much money our schools get so they can cover those costs without losing any positions (since the DC Council always funds the contract).

**Solution: Show up to the table before the WTU Contract expires and then negotiate in good faith to benefit our students, educators and school communities.**

### **Challenge: School populations are unstable, especially in schools East of the River.**

Because we use “Student Based Budgeting,” that is primarily based on how many students a school serves and less on programming, this causes our budgets to fluctuate widely. This is further compounded based on DCPS inability to properly predict our enrollment numbers. Last year our prediction was very high, and I am concerned we have been unable to meet those numbers, which now means we will be facing years of cuts if previous patterns are any indication. When this is compounded with the large number of charter schools, the challenges with high quality, stable and affordable housing that many of our students face, and then the life events that can push further instability, we see a large number of students come and go from our school which often are unaccounted for.

**Solution: Fund schools based on long-term, programmatic planning.**

We should instead base the bulk of our funding off multi-year models that are about sustained investment in the programming and outcomes we want to see. DCPS should be sending in experts who can be requested based on the needs of the school to help create those plans with the LSAT and then we can have more targeted measures that we truly are using to gauge if the investments are being done in a way that benefits the students we serve.

**Challenge: Constant churn of “innovations” that often have real costs on time, workload and school budgets.**

More needs to be done to align DCPS budget with our priorities of investing in students. Too often outside groups are driving large scale changes and not considering the full costs which our local schools are then forced to cover, eating into our general education fund.

**Solution: DCPS has to lower the costs and spending of central office and increase the spending at and by our local public-school communities.**

If we 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 local school’s ability to truly serve their students. Impressively, at the same time DCPS Central Office provides 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.

**Challenge: DCPS does not follow the law to ensure that schools are receiving their full At-Risk, ELL and Special Education funds and NOT using them to supplant the funds that schools are typically owed based on the Comprehensive Staffing Model.**

Enough said.

**Solution: Follow the law and DC Auditor’s report.**

DCPS Central Office has still not fixed the problems pointed out by the DC Auditor and that goes for other targeted funds.

**Challenge: Lack of adequate school technology.**

The technology we have at the high school level is nowhere near the quality we need to do the kind of work we are being asked to do.

**Solution: Fund it.**

**Caleb E. Ward**

**Ludlow-Taylor Elementary School LSAT Parent Representative**

**Committee of the Whole Public Oversight Hearing**

**DC Public Schools Budgeting Practices**

**Council of the District of Columbia**

**November 14<sup>th</sup> 2023**

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Caleb Ward. I am a Ward 6 resident, pediatrician and father of 3 children enrolled in DCPS. I am a parent representative on the Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) at Ludlow-Taylor Elementary School, an incredible DCPS school, with 11% of students in special education, and 17% of students designated at risk.

First, I wanted to thank the Council for passing the *DC Schools First in Budgeting Amendment Act of 2022*. I have served on our LSAT for several years, and every year we start budget season having to figure out where to cut funding, which invariably means teacher positions. Two years ago, it was a school librarian and science teacher, who were on the chopping block; last year a PE teacher and a science teacher. The *Schools First Budgeting Act* is an important way to prevent the damage and disruption cause by these funding cuts.

Second, however, I want to encourage the Council to do anything in its power to ensure that unlike last year, DCPS complies with this legislation in a timely manner. Last year, our school was one of many that was presented with an initial budget cut of \$326,000 unrelated to student enrollment. This would have led to multiple teaching positions being cut. While DCPS eventually amended this budget, they did not do so until the early summer. This timing and uncertainty creates untenable stresses for our educators. These teachers have families to support, and no shortage of school systems looking to hire them. Teachers found other positions (in some cases outside of DC) only for the funds to then be allocated for their old positions. Our Principal was left hiring to fill a vacancy that only existed because DCPS did not comply with this legislation.

Third, I want to emphasize the importance of timing when DCPS releases budgets to school communities. Last year these budgets were released over a DCPS vacation. This made it incredibly challenging for LSATs (which include parents and teachers) to provide robust review and guidance to principals on a tight timeline.

Finally, as a pediatrician, I want to underscore that while COVID-19 pandemic funding may ending, the damage done to children is just starting to unfold. This is starkly illustrated in both academic performance and mental health. While DCPS reported modest district-wide increases in proficiency in PARCC data last year, an EmpowerK12 report estimated it would take 3 – 4 years to return to 2019 levels of proficiency. It will take longer if schools are faced with budget cuts. Our schools need ongoing funding so that principals can retain talented teachers, keep class sizes appropriate, fund high-impact tutoring and purchase high quality instructional materials.

Additionally, the pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the mental health of children. The American Academy of Pediatrics has noted that we are observing soaring rates of depression, anxiety and suicidality in children. A report from Children's National found that 20% of the District's children have a mental, emotional, or behavioral problems. I see the impact of this every day in the emergency room. Schools play a critical role in addressing this, screening students and deploying primary prevention strategies. They cannot do this if key mental health and other staff positions are not funded or funded so late in the budget cycle that they are difficult to fill.

I thank the Council for their ongoing support of students and educators in DCPS.

**Caleb E. Ward**

**Ludlow-Taylor Elementary School LSAT Parent Representative**

[calebeward@gmail.com](mailto:calebeward@gmail.com)



**Tyesha Andrews**  
**DCPS FY25 Public Budget Hearing**  
**November 14, 2023**

Good evening,

My name is Ty Andrews, and I am a Ward 8 resident, and proud parent of a freshman at McKinley Tech. I am also a parent leader with PAVE on the Citywide/Ward 8 PLE Boards; Mary H. Plummer LSAT member, and McKinley Tech PTO 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President. Today I am testifying to ask for required, additional funding in the capitol budget to be dispensed for renovations issues at McKinley Tech High School.

McKinley Tech needs **funding for Full modernization.** The building issues at McKinley Tech are as follows:

- No hot water throughout school
- No water source in cafeteria
- Heaters at Front entryway are not operable
- Drain leak in the upstairs garden

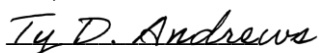
When the plants in the garden are watered, it leaks down into the breezeway and has damaged the windows and ceiling. Until those repairs are done, the garden cannot be used. Two other issues that were brought to light are a mice infestation, that has been going on for some time now. Also, the request to have better quality runners to be put down in the entryway when there is bad weather. The staff is currently using cardboard when there is bad weather and the heaters in that area are not operable.

Next, there has not been a water fountain in the cafeteria since the school reopened. Staff has submitted a work order for a water fountain, but it was denied. When this was brought to Facilities Specialist attention, the response was, if we move forward with a long-term solution, it will become a FY25 project. To install the water fountain, we will need to install new water pipelines, which involve the investigation of existing lines and designing where the new fountains will be placed in the cafeteria. Demolition can impact kitchen operations and installation of the water fountains.

According to the DCPS website, and I quote "Your mission is to ensure that every student has a world-class education and the resources needed to succeed. The updated budget model is designed to support DCPS' overall mission and goal to provide equitable resources so every student can excel." If this is truly a goal of DCPS and its counterparts and constituents, funding will be provided to assist McKinley in achieving this goal.

Thank you for your time.

Best,



**Ty D. Andrews**

Citywide / Ward 8 PLE Board

**Tyesha Andrews**  
**DCPS FY25 Public Budget Hearing**  
**November 14, 2023**

Good evening,

My name is Ty Andrews, and I am a Ward 8 resident, and proud parent of a student at Mary H. Plummer Elementary School. I am also a parent leader with PAVE on the Citywide/Ward 8 PLE Boards; Plummer LSAT member, and McKinley Tech PTO committee member. Today I am testifying to ask for required, additional funding for the operating and capital budgets to be dispensed for renovations and administrative issues at Mary H. Plummer Elementary.

First, Plummer requires a large amount of funding from the operating and Capital budgets. **The school requires a Full modernization.** The Plummer building has not been renovated since about 2005, and that renovation took place in just one summer break. More time is needed to fully renovate an education center for our children. The library has folding chairs and old carpet for the students to sit on. The bookshelves are not conducive to the height of elementary school children. Plummer has been having ongoing HVAC issues since 2016. In 2019, it was so hot in the school that they had to move the summer school to another location. Repairs for the system are always temporary; and some rooms must have window A/C units. In addition, there is exposed piping in the stairwell and gym. Plummer also has an electricity issue where they cannot get an electric marquee due to the inability to provide the appropriate power. There is limited storage in classrooms which does not compare to newer schools. The remodel that was completed for Plummer was done in one summer and is unfair and unacceptable to the school community. It is challenging for Plummer to compete for enrollment with an older building.

Next, the first floor has limited natural lighting due to the lack of windows; the library has folding chairs and old carpets for the students to sit on. The bookshelves are not conducive to the height of elementary school children. The brightness and colors inside any school impact the mental stability of the staff and students; a brighter school is a happier school. Plummer needs to look more inviting to the community to increase enrollment and ensure that funding stays the same and increases.

How can schools like Plummer compete with the local Charter schools if they receive different funding? This causes low enrollment in all DCPS. Plummer is only a few blocks away from KIPP. Plummer should be able to match and compete with KIPP. There needs to be more equity and responses toward the needs of the Plummer school community. Additional funding should be provided for **marketing materials because every school year and during** enrollment audit time mailboxes are flooded with flyers promoting local charter schools. Providing dedicated funds to Ward 8 DCPS schools levels the field for recruitment.

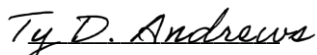
Last, Plummer needs **funding to increase paraprofessionals and for social emotional learning support.** Plummer has three federally mandated Autism classrooms but only one part-time paraprofessional, Ms. Phaedra Smith, funding should be provided to Plummer for a full-time paraprofessional. Plummer is also currently without a Speech-Language pathologist or Occupational Therapist. How are we supposed to support our D.C. youth if they are not provided with the required assistance and resources to be better and prevail in life, let alone education.

According to the DCPS website, and I quote “Your mission is to ensure that every student has a world-class education and the resources needed to succeed. The updated budget model is designed to support DCPS’ overall mission and goal to provide equitable resources so every student can excel.” If this is truly a goal of DCPS and its counterparts and constituents, funding will be provided to assist McKinley in achieving this goal.

**Based on these facts**, Plummer should receive additional funding for staff and classroom supports and be added to the list of schools on the DGS school modernization project.

Thank you for your time.

Best,



**Ty D. Andrews**

*PAVE Citywide / Ward 8 PLE Board*

November 13, 2023

## DCPS Fiscal Year 2025 (School Year 24-25) Public Budget Hearing

### Testimony of Tihana Bartulac Blanc

Good afternoon!

My name is Tihana Bartulac Blanc. I am a parent at Hardy Middle School (as well as Stoddert Elementary) and serve as the Executive VP for DEI and Co-VP for Advocacy on Hardy PTO. I'm here to talk about some key budget needs based on challenges faced this year and to advocate for an increase in our FY 2025 budget.

Kudos to DCPS for making this school-level budget data so transparent. Thanks to the DCPS budget website we know that Hardy has one of **the tightest DCPS per-student budgets in the District** while also not receiving Title 1 funds and despite lacking the economies of scale of otherwise comparable but larger DCPS middle schools.

Specifically: Hardy's budget for this year is only \$12,877 per student.<sup>1</sup> The only school in the District with a lower allocation is Deal at \$12,246 per student, but with more than double the student population, it benefits from substantial economies of scale.

As a result Hardy has the **second-highest student-teacher ratio** and the **second-lowest per-pupil non-personnel allocation** across all DCPS middle schools Hardy's student per teacher ratio is over 25 students per teacher in almost half of its core classes, including 59% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes, with as many as 30 students in 26% of classes. We need increased funding to achieve a minimal goal of having no classes over 25 students per teacher in FY 2025.

Last week, Hardy LSAT released the enrollment projections for FY2024/25 and Hardy is projected for enrollment larger than this year<sup>2</sup> so we are expecting the budget to increase as well.

Hardy's non-personal budget is just \$80 per student.<sup>3</sup> While our PTO has been happy to help, this exceptionally tight budget means that Hardy has needed to depend on the PTO almost exclusively for even the most basic supplies like toilet paper and cleaning supplies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dcpsbudget.com/budget-data/>

<sup>2</sup> Hardy has grown from 26-40 students every year progressively since SY 19-20 [474 in 19-20; 500 in 20-21; 531 in 21-22; 571 in 22-23 (or by 26, by 31 by 40)]. We see no reason that Hardy's prior growth rate would be reduced.

<sup>3</sup> While the other DCPS middle schools have \$400 per student for non-personnel spending on average, Hardy's budget allowed just 20% of this total (\$80 per student) to be set-aside for non-personnel needs.

We are talking about essential supplies for middle school children which includes our girls experiencing their first periods. As if being in middle school is not hard enough (I hope you also hear directly from the children, especially girls how difficult this can be) we are depriving them of essential supplies at this most delicate age both physically and mentally. We know our girls' sense of belonging is at its lowest at 34% (although we are encouraged to see some small but steady improvements) according to the Panorama survey<sup>4</sup>, our school not being able to provide them with such basic supplies does not help with their sense of belonging at all.

I am proud that last week, we held a Girls Leadership event that almost 160 girls attended, and one of the main challenges included technology issues. The microphone did not work properly and even on a crisp, fall day the auditorium was exceptionally warm causing many kids to simply leave and miss an educational and networking opportunity. But this wasn't even the worse experience with technology at Hardy.

At Hardy, we simply don't have enough devices to provide when replacements are needed despite the fact that the bulk of in-class and homework assignments must be completed online. As devices are outdated and the software not updated, this happens frequently. My own child was issued two entirely non-functional devices before the first thirty days of school were over. We are providing less than \$6 in educational supplies per child at Hardy. Due to its diversity and kids coming from multiple Wards and feeder schools, Hardy has kids who are particularly negatively impacted when we ask them to supply their own devices or chargers to complete their IXL homework or connect on Aspen.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important issues!

Tihana B. Blanc

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<sup>4</sup> <https://hardyms.org/ourpages/auto/2023/9/19/50599017/9.13.23%20-%20Principal%27s%20Update%20from%20PTO%20Meeting.pdf?rnd=1695129475192>

## **Testimony before the DCPS Office of Engagement and Partnerships**

Dana Springer, Co-Chair, Local School Advisory Team, School Without Walls High School  
November 14, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today’s DCPS Public Budget Hearing, and thank you to my fellow participants and the public for guiding our school system’s use of resources. I am testifying here on behalf of the School Without Walls High School’s Local School Advisory Team.

We want to emphasize three points about budgets for the 2024-25 school year and beyond:

1. Funding stability is paramount.
2. Funding levels must adequately meet the needs of students and schools.
3. Budgets and enrollment must take into consideration school facilities.

### **Funding stability is paramount.**

Funding stability is necessary to ensure consistency of faculty and staff and programming from year to year and, in turn, enable the School Without Walls High School—and any school—to deliver on its mission. Unexpected cuts, even when temporary, disrupt school operations and have long-term consequences, including staff departures, reduced student learning, and loss of public trust. The funding stability for the 2023-24 school year, thanks to the Schools First in Budgeting Act, has meant stability in staffing and programming for the School Without Walls High School for the first time in years. Predictable funding has enabled our school to start the school year with all positions filled, students learning from day 1, and the faculty focusing on strengthening academics, enrichment, and mental health, rather than on plugging holes. This is in sharp contrast to years past, when faculty or staff positions were cut and we went deep into the school year without teachers because “found” funds came too late. We urge DCPS to ensure funding stability for all schools.

### **Funding levels must adequately meet the needs of students and schools.**

Since the pandemic, students across the city have greater needs for academic support, mental health services, and basic necessities. We have experienced this trend acutely at the School Without Walls High School. We are doing what we can to meet students’ needs as a community, but at current funding levels it is challenging. For example, our school psychologist and social worker provide mental health supports to students on a daily basis, but are just two people serving nearly 600 students. Academic services, tutoring, and counseling are all making a difference at the School Without Walls High School, but they require adequate staffing and continuity of funding.

Moreover, schools’ budgets must also fund core academic programming. It is not reasonable to assume that the services and supplies necessary for running a school will be covered by external funds, as is currently necessary to fill gaps. For example, our Home and School

Association helps ensure rigorous teaching and learning can be realized at the School Without Walls High School by providing teacher-requested supplies and textbooks. This is absurd—DCPS funding for schools should adequately cover what is needed to deliver high-quality instruction. We understand that long-promised smartboards will be installed at our school this school year. DCPS must also ensure that technology provided to schools across the city is maintained and supported into the future.

**Budgets and enrollment must take into consideration school facilities.**

School Without Walls High School students love their school and the college environment that comes with being within the George Washington University (GWU) campus. However, the building itself is perpetually overcrowded to an extent that is unhealthy and impacts student learning. Our school has a current enrollment of 598 students in a building with a capacity for 520 students (see [2018 Master Facilities Plan](#) p. A-52). A [2013 report commissioned by the Deputy Mayor for Education](#) says our high schools need at least 192 square feet per student, but School Without Walls High School provides 115 square feet per student (see [2018 Master Facilities Plan](#))—in other words, not even two-thirds of the minimum space called for.

Inexplicably, in spite of over-enrollment, DCPS proposes further increasing enrollment at School Without Walls High School by an additional 11 students for the 2024-25 school year, bringing our enrollment to 609. Does the projected enrollment increase come with plans to build out another floor of classrooms and common spaces? Most of our 38 teachers share classrooms and many teachers spend their days in windowless basement classrooms. The building does not have an auditorium or a gymnasium in which to hold assemblies, performances, or P.E. classes. For many years, our partnership with George Washington University helped meet our needs for space for assemblies, performances, mandated testing, and classes, but we can no longer rely on the university for this. Given these constraints and the need to provide a safe and healthy environment for students and teachers, our school and grade-level enrollment cannot exceed current levels.

Moreover, the School Without Walls High School’s building, last renovated in 2009, is one whose systems are failing. For example, the HVAC system performs at dangerously subpar levels, with areas of the building lacking sufficient heat, cooling, or air flow depending on the day. Not only are building issues problematic from a health and safety point of view, dealing with them takes time away from what should be the focus of the administration and teachers—instruction. We look forward to hearing from DCPS and the Deputy Mayor for Education, via the Master Facilities Plan process, about solutions to ongoing building maintenance and capacity issues that are continuously raised by educators, families, and students.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today.

Alexandra Simbana Written Testimony  
DCPS Budget Hearing  
November 13, 2023

Good evening. My name is Alexandra Simbana and I am a proud parent of two DCPS students at two different DCPS schools.

First, I want to highlight the excellent and unwavering work our teachers, staff and admin do each and every day. It is particularly impressive when you focus in on the administrative and process complications that they must endure as they work to educate our children without fail.

I would like to highlight a significant issue experienced at Takoma Elementary, a Title I school. The school has a wonderful and enduring relationship with the DC Youth Orchestra Program (DCYOP) with a use of space agreement which allows DCYOP to use the facilities for their weekend programming. This program and the relationship with the school is incredible and it is a great addition to the Ward 4 community. Unfortunately, through my work with the LSAT and PTO, I have learned that while the school makes the building available to the Orchestra and the Orchestra pays for use of the building, none of that money has been making it back to the school since Spring 2022! It is getting held up at the Central Office for some reason. This year, our PTO was asked to help float the costs associated with this deficiency to provide janitorial supplies for our children's daily use because the P-card is frozen. The cost of the janitorial supplies is \$2,000/week. Despite our desire to provide educational experiences to our students, we had to prioritize this need as it came down to a matter of health and sanitation. There are two issues at play here: 1) there is a clear breakdown between the office who receives the payment for the use of space agreement and those funds being properly allocated back to the school this must be fixed with urgency and 2) the misaligned budget allocation timetables place our school communities at a disadvantage where the school's needs never change to service the students but their access for funding is cut off at critical times of the year. This is a problem with operations at the Central Office level.

The second issue is closely related to the first as it pertains to misaligned timing to access funds. As we noted in our testimony from Digital Equity in DC Education, the prolonged procurement process which last 24 weeks is not responsive to our school's changing technology needs. We see throughout the DCPS system, we are not meeting the commitment of 1:1 computers for students. DCPS Central must acknowledge is an operational failure which is hurting our kids' education. While DCPS may not own all of this process it CAN and SHOULD ADVOCATE FOR CHANGES TO THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS TO HELP SCHOOLS.

**Transparency and Predictable school budgets should be what DCPS schools and central office push to enforce!** A school community cannot build on progress made when every year the budget process may force them to cut programs/positions. Advocating for and supporting the First in Budgeting Act must be supported by parents, schools, and THIS LEA because it provides stability for our students, teachers, and schools. Also, it is THE LAW!!

Teacher and staff retention is tied to predictable school budgets. Our teachers must be able to know their positions are firmly established at their schools through the school budgets. If we are forcing our teachers to feel like they must be constantly on the lookout for another job because they don't feel confident in the one, they have, that's a problem. And an entirely self-inflicted and avoidable one.



Additionally, when we make a commitment to pay a teacher or paraprofessional compensation, then it should be honored WITH HASTE! I know of three paraprofessionals who had to depart their postings because they were not receiving their paychecks. This is not unique to just a handful of schools. Again, these are administrative failures at Central Office that hit at the school-level and effect the stability and learning environments of the students.

Lastly, I would like to strongly encourage DCPS to have a mechanism where schools that receive an excess of additional students well above their projections before and after Count Day, that they should receive additional funding to help the school fully service the new students and ensure programming is not affected for the rest of the school population. At Takoma, we have welcomed almost 90 new students since August.

**Overall school budgets need established and predicible budgets so they can plan accordingly and not waste time re-inventing the school wheel each year because of unpredictable funding.** At Takoma they have made incredible strides in the last year with so many students coming back from the pandemic with additional needs, trauma and even though they have shown success in their models and approach, they are losing funding and much needed schoolwide positions. Removing funding from them, especially as enrollment keeps increasing is creating a situation where all their hard work will evaporate, and we will be able to clearly see the ramifications of budget cuts as kids suffer in the aftermath of smaller school budgets.

Teachers feel the stress. Constantly being asked to do more with less. Having to reach into their own pockets to buy pencils and glue sticks and toilet paper for the kids. Struggling with computers that don't work and take 24 weeks to replace. Losing paraprofessionals who didn't get a paycheck. This is ALL UNACCEPTABLE.

This year for example had the Council not stepped in with additional funding Takoma would've had to cut an Instructional Coach Math, Instructional Coach ELA, Instructional Coach ECE. Even after the council's intervention, the school still had to delay ordering of curriculum materials because funds won't be accessible until January/February 2024.

Just today, the Chancellor spoke about having "ongoing conversations" with OCFO and he is assured that funding issues do not affect the schools. That is simply not true. All stakeholders, of which the LEA is one, should place the proper funding and operational functioning at the school level. The city talks about valuing teachers and wanting to retain teachers but then sends budget cuts. We are out here bringing our lived experiences and at every turn those experiences are denied or pushed aside. This is also a administrative failure from the top. You can not address the issues in our system unless you acknowledge the issues at hand.

I have been active with DCPS since 2015 and each time an arm of DCPS has asked for parents to help and serve, I have done my part as do so many of my fellow DCPS parents in big and small ways each day, at every school. We need to see ACTION and real concrete SOLUTIONS to ensure all DC children have the access to the best education. Our children deserve our best efforts and our determination to ensure they are prepared for the future.

Thanks again to our wonderful teachers, and staff.

Thank you for your time.



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# GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

## ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 1A

*Proudly Serving Columbia Heights*

### VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

November 8, 2023

Dr. Lewis Ferebee  
Chancellor, DC Public Schools  
1200 1st Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20002

### **Re: Fiscal Year 2025 LGBTQ+ Investments**

Dear Chancellor Ferebee:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A (“ANC 1A”) serves a diverse community with many families across a range of income levels and needs. Throughout the past year, ANC 1A’s Committee on Education, Youth, and Family held a series of community engagement events in partnership with local partners and targeted at residents across Ward 1. We would like to bring to your attention some critical concerns regarding the District of Columbia Public Schools (“DCPS”) LGBTQ+ resources and its transgender/gender-questioning policies. These resources and policies are essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students, and there is a need for immediate updates and improvements.

As you work to draft your FY2025 budget submissions, ANC 1A requests **increased support to the DC Public Schools LGBTQ+ and Sexual Health Program** for the critical work they are doing. We have identified a number of areas that these investments could improve, including, but not limited to:

- **Outdated Transgender/Gender-Questioning Policy:** The current policy was last updated in 2015 and may not fully meet the needs and rights of transgender and gender-questioning students. We recommend a thorough review and revision to align with current best practices and legal requirements and that funding be provided to implement.
- **Update LGBTQ plan for staff and educators:** DCPS has not updated its existing LGBTQ Plan since August 2011. It is crucial to provide guidance and training for staff and educators to create a welcoming and supportive



environment for LGBTQ+ students. We recommend a thorough review and revision to align with current best practices and legal requirements and that funding be provided to implement.

- **Inadequate LGBTQ+ Resources and Information for Families:** The existing LGBTQ+ resources provided by DCPS need updates and expansion. The DCPS landing page for resources and information should provide working links to all materials and support to promote LGBTQ+ inclusion, awareness, and acceptance in our schools.<sup>1</sup>
- **Support for LGBTQ+ Students:** Our LGBTQ+ students need accessible and updated support services, counseling, and safe spaces. We must evaluate and improve the availability and quality of these services. Funding should be allocated to ensure every school and student body can access school-based support groups or clubs such as Gay Straight Alliances.
- **Menstrual Products in ALL DCPS bathrooms regardless of gender:** Menstruation is not exclusive to cisgender women. D.C. ACT24-294 requires District high schools, middle schools, UDC, and private post-secondary schools to provide free period products in all women's and gender-neutral bathrooms. ANC 1A believes this bill is not inclusive and disregards that transgender men, non-binary individuals, and gender-diverse individuals can also menstruate.

Every DCPS school should provide menstrual products in *all* restrooms, regardless of gender designation. This recognizes the diverse needs of individuals and promotes gender equality while addressing public health and hygiene concerns. By making menstrual products available in *all* restrooms, we acknowledge and support the needs of everyone, regardless of their gender identity, and we avoid forcing individuals into gender-neutral spaces when they are clear and confident in their identity.

The LGBTQ+ community, including transgender and gender-questioning students, is a valued and integral part of the diverse student body at DCPS. Our educational policies and resources

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<sup>1</sup> Nonworking links include, but are not limited to:

- [DCPS LGBTQ+ Parent/Caregivers Resources](#);
- [Read the role description for LGBTQ Liaisons here.](#)
- [Niños Saludables con el Apoyo Familiar \(Spanish\)](#);
- [DCPS LGBTQ+ Support & Inclusion: A Quick Reference Guide](#)
- [LGBTQ+ & Sexual Health Training Menu](#)



must reflect a commitment to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

ANC 1A recognizes that DCPS is committed to providing a supportive learning environment for all its students and the excellent work being done. An increased investment in the LGBTQ and Sexual Health Program will ensure we meet our commitment to serve our LGBTQ+ students. ANC 1A requests that you take action to address those non-budgetary concerns promptly. By updating and enhancing policies and resources, we can create a more inclusive and accepting educational community.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We look forward to your positive response and commitment to creating a more inclusive educational environment for all students.

Sincerely,

Christine Miller  
Community Chair, Committee on Education, Youth, and Family  
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A

Cc: Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn  
Maggie Gurley, Deputy Chief of Staff, DCPS  
Amy Maisterra, Deputy Chancellor, DCPS  
Patrick Ashley, Chief, Fiscal Strategy, DCPS  
Sarah Parker, Engagement Officer, Engagement and Partnerships  
Director Japer Bowles, Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs

**Certification:**

On November 8th, 2023, at a properly noticed public meeting and with a quorum of Commissioners present, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A voted to adopt this letter and direct its transmittal to the addressed agency. YEAS 8, NAYS 0, AND ABSTENTIONS 0. Christine Miller, Chair of ANC 1A's Education, Youth, and Family Committee is authorized to communicate these actions to and testify before any agency of the Government of the District of Columbia or the members of the Council of the District of Columbia.



Chancellor Ferebee  
FY25 LGBTQ+ Investments  
November 8, 2023  
Page 4

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DLM", written in a cursive style.

Dieter Lehmann Morales  
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony J. E. Thomas-Davis", written in a cursive style.

Anthony Thomas-Davis  
Secretary, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1A

## DCPS FY24 BUDGET TESTIMONY

Tara Brown

ANC Commissioner 8D04

PAVE Citywide Board Member Representing Ward 8

GOOD EVENING,

MY NAME IS TARA BROWN. I AM A PAVE PARENT LEADER, AN ANC COMMISSIONER REPRESENTING 8D AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, I AM A WARD 8 PARENT.

I'VE LIVED IN THE BELLVUE COMMUNITY SINCE MY DAUGHTER WAS IN KINDERGARTEN. SHE IS CURRENTLY IN HER JUNIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL. I WAS A DCPS PARENT FOR THE FIRST 8 YEARS OF MY DAUGHTER'S EDUCATION, SO MY SUGGESTION TODAY COMES WITH SOME EXPERIENCE.

WHEN CONSIDERING HOW BEST TO UTILIZE YOUR FY24 BUDGET, YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT SETTING AND MAINTAINING A STANDARD FOR ALL DCPS SCHOOLS.

I'M SURE IT IS NOT NEWS TO YOU THAT DCPS SCHOOLS ARE NOT TREATED WITH EQUALITY. THERE IS NOT A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE THAT DCPS STRIVES TO MAINTAIN FOR ALL SCHOOLS. THE EVIDENCE OF THIS LACK OF STANDARDS IS IN THE NUMBERS. DCPS HAS THE IMMENSE RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE 52% OF THE SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN IN DC. WARD 8 IS HOME TO THE LARGEST NUMBER OF STUDENTS, YET OVER HALF OF THOSE STUDENTS LEAVE WARD 8 TO ATTEND OTHER SCHOOLS. OVER HALF OF THE STUDENTS THAT LEAVE TRAVEL FOR AN HOUR OR MORE. WHY WOULD FAMILIES CHOOSE TO BYPASS THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS AND SUBJECT THEIR CHILDREN TO THE DANGERS OF UNSAFE PASSAGE, WITH THE UPTICK OF VIOLENCE IN THE CITY? THE ANSWER IS THAT WE ARE SEEKING SCHOOLS THAT OPERATE AT A HIGHER STANDARD THAN WHAT IS AVAILABLE TO US IN WARD 8.

WHEN MY DAUGHTER ATTENDED PATTERSON ELEMENTARY, SHE DID NOT GO ON ANY FIELD TRIPS. I WAS TOLD THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH MONEY FOR TRANSPORTATION. THEY COULD ONLY AFFORD TO HIRE A LIBRARIAN PART TIME. AT LECKIE ELEMENTARY, THEY COULD NOT KEEP THEIR BELOVED ART TEACHER, DUE TO LACK OF FUNDS. THE FOURTH GRADE CLASSES SHARED A SET OF OUTDATED TABLETS THAT DID NOT WORK VERY WELL.

A STANDARD WOULD ESTABLISH A LEVEL AT WHICH ALL OF YOUR SCHOOLS SHOULD OPERATE. ALL SCHOOLS SHOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE FIELD TRIPS. ALL SCHOOLS SHOULD HAVE A FULL TIME LIBRARIAN, ART AND MUSIC INSTRUCTION, ACCESS TO SPECIAL PROGRAMS LIKE GIFTED AND TALENTED, AP OPTIONS, AND DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS. YOUR BUDGET SHOULD BE USED TO EQUITABLY RAISE THE STANDARDS FOR SCHOOLS THAT HAVE 90 DEGREE CLASSROOMS, NO HOT WATER, MISSING VITAL STAFF LIKE LIBRARIANS/COUNSELORS/NURSES AND HUMANITIES TEACHERS. YOUR BUDGET SHOULD TAKE AN HONEST LOOK AT YOUR SCHOOLS AND WHAT IS MISSING FROM THEM. WARD 8 SCHOOLS DESERVE TO BE ELEVATED. SET A STANDARD THAT GIVES OUR STUDENTS A CHANCE TO THRIVE, WITH ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND A WELL ROUNDED/DIVERSE EDUCATION.

THIS BUDGET IS ABOUT MORE THAN NUMBERS. IT REPRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO ENRICH YOUR STUDENTS, ALL OF YOUR STUDENTS. PARENTS IN WARD 8 WANT BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR KIDS WITHOUT HAVING TO PUT THEM IN HARMS WAY TO TRAVEL ACROSS TOWN. I SPEAK FOR WARD 8 PARENTS BECAUSE I AM ONE. MY DAUGHTER HAS BEEN STALKED AND SEXUALLY ASSAULTED TRAVELING OUTSIDE OF WARD 8 TO SCHOOL IN THE SAME YEAR. I FACE THE FEAR OF HER TREK TO ANOTHER WARD 5 DAYS A WEEK. WARD 8 FAMILIES SHOULD NOT HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SAFETY AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. SET STANDARDS. RAISE ALL OF YOUR SCHOOLS TO THAT LEVEL AND KEEP THEM THERE. THAT IS HOW THE LARGEST LEA IN THE CITY CAN BEST USE THEIR BUDGET.

THANK YOU

**Libbie Buchele**

My name is Libbie Buchele, and I am a parent of three kids at Jackson-Reed High School. I am here today to express my extreme concern over the new nursing allocation plan, which is deeply affecting the quality of life of DC students. In 2016, parents shared their objection to a plan that would split up nurses into different schools. Council acted to ensure that nurses would continue to be allocated by school. However, recently, this new inadequate allocation formula has gone into effect.

I have heard from councilmember staff that this nursing allocation was done to "relieve a nursing shortage." I have heard from concerned parents across the city that this unrealistic allocation has instead led to more nurses leaving the system. Furthermore, parents say that they have no transparency regarding when a nurse or a nurse's aide will be there. Many parents have stated that their school has little to no coverage. I have heard horror stories of ambulances called to schools to rescue kids who could have just received an epi pen. Our kids are unsafe.

The plan appears to allocate one nurse per four schools plus one aide. My analysis of the allocation formula (as of 9-05-2023) shows that the allocation does not take into account size of schools. For example, Jackson-Reed high school (the largest high school in the city) is in the same cluster (cluster 14) as Janney, Murch, and Eaton. Together, this cluster totals 3,914 children. Deal is in the same cluster as Lafayette, Hearst, and Oyster-Adams. Together, these schools total 3,397 children. This is dangerous and irresponsible.

I have heard the nursing shortage used as an excuse for this poor allocation formula. But since past history on this issue has shown that nurses like to be housed in schools due to consistent clientele and favorable working conditions, I cannot help but think that this allocation formula is actually intended to save money. I would urge DCPS and the Department of Health work together to increase school nurses' salaries to improve retention rates and ensure that the promise that we received 4 years ago -- for a nurse for each school-- may be fulfilled.

Thank you.



## **Testimony of Anne Louise Taylor**

### **DCPS Budget Hearing, 11/14/2023**

I'm submitting testimony as a Seaton Elementary parent and in my capacity as this year's President of the Ward 2 Education Council.

I am very concerned about two budget challenges facing Seaton specifically, and some other Ward 2 schools are in the same position. The first challenge is continued budget cuts at a time when Seaton's enrollment is growing much faster than DCPS projected. The second is the threat of additional cuts if enrollment growth slows when the school is located in a swing space for two years starting in 2026. Neither of these threats to the school's programming and staff is inevitable; they are the result of the city's policy choices and could be avoided.

Under the school budget model DCPS introduced last year, Seaton, like many other schools, is projected to receive less money for three years in a row. These cuts are being implemented at a time that DCPS's enrollment is increasing, including at Seaton. Seaton's actual enrollment has exceeded projections since the pandemic. Due to budget cuts enacted for this year, Seaton was not able to hire enough staff to fill the minimum number of general education positions we needed, and some classrooms are overcrowded as a result. Kindergarten is the most crowded, but even the upper grades are fuller than they have been in years. The LSAT expects similar enrollment growth next year, increasing to over 400 students. If the planned cuts are enacted during another year of substantial growth, even more classrooms will be crowded. Seaton is a Title I school with a significant immigrant population. These budget cuts being made to elementary schools in the name of equity are harming our students and hurting schools' ability to retain experienced staff who are integral to our children's success. This same issue will replay at several other schools in Ward 2 if budgets are not planned to keep up with enrollment.

The second issue I mentioned is DCPS's policy of allowing cuts to school budgets during modernization. School Without Walls @ Francis-Stevens is in its second year in a swing space while the building is modernized. Predictably, enrollment dropped while the school is in a swing space. This is a common occurrence. Francis-Stevens had to eliminate programming due to subsequent budget cuts, which not only affects students and teachers but may also deter prospective students. Even if the school sees a rebound in enrollment next year in the brand new, modernized building, they will have to wait another year to see any growth in the budget. A school can't make the best use of a beautiful new auditorium if it doesn't have a drama teacher. Never-used classrooms sit empty while others are overcrowded if you can't hire new teachers. School leadership may have difficulty rehiring specialized teachers for the programs that had to be cut during the modernization. It's incredibly counter-productive and short-sighted to cut budgets for two consecutive years based on what is certainly a temporary drop in enrollment.

Seaton is slated for modernization in less than three years. Our community should be excited about the modernization, and we are. But we're also anxious about what unintended consequences are awaiting our wonderful school. The swing space we're planned for, KC Lewis, has not been used as an elementary school in recent memory. The building and playground are not modernized and not likely to attract new families. How can we be excited about our renovated future facility if spending 2 years in a swing space means we're likely facing cuts to programming, losing beloved teachers, and having to rebuild trust with affected families?

DCPS should adopt a policy of stabilizing budgets for two years while a school is modernized. Communicating such a policy to schools that are approaching modernization would do so much to allay fears and help schools plan effectively and confidently.

Anne Louise Taylor

November 13, 2023

To the Members of the D.C. Council:

My name is Gideon Culman and this is my fourth year as a parent at Eaton Elementary School. Since the summer I have been serving as Eaton's Local School Advisory Team chair. At Eaton students, teachers, families and administrators take pride in participating in a warm community that right now works very well.

Mayor Bowser's proposed 5% budget cuts would make our community less welcoming and less effective. At Eaton's November Local School Advisory Team meeting members discussed the likely impact of a 5% budget cut: Last year, when similar cuts were announced, a front office administrator and the school's English Language Arts and Math specialists were positions targeted for elimination. Considering the students' perspective illustrates the impacts these cuts would have:

The front office is the first place that students go for minor injuries when a nurse is not onsite. An administrator can provide ice and reassurance. They can lower the anxiety a student may feel when waiting to see the principal. The administrator's presence helps students to feel taken care of. They know they are not alone. The absence of an administrator would make mountains out of molehills, turning routine hiccups that schools can expect into reasons students may not feel as reassured or welcome at school.

The English Language Arts and Math specialists complement the work of classroom teachers. Their presence allows the classroom teachers to focus targeted support to students at all skill levels. Not only do students who struggle with English Language Arts and Math receive extra attention, so do students who excel. Eaton is able to meet each student where they are and challenge them.

This morning, on our walk to school, I told my third-grade son Isaac about Mayor Bowser's proposed budget cuts. I told him which positions had been targeted last year and we had a frank conversation about the impact on him and his peers if this year's proposed budget cuts went through.

I started by asking him what it's like to meet in small groups with the Math specialist, Ms. Sawyer.

"We do estimations, like, 'How many beads are in this jar?' It's usually a higher number than people expect. Then we do like some fun problems. Sometimes we do fun activities also. They're fun, hard, new, and I don't know a lot of them, so I have to figure them out and use clues. And it's fun.

When I asked Isaac what would be missing if he couldn't meet with Ms. Sawyer anymore, he was frank: "I would be missing some hard and fun games. And there wouldn't be as many good mathematicians" at Eaton.

Isaac summed up his participation in the instruction offered by Eaton's Math specialist Ms. Sawyer: "I'm proud I get to do it."

On behalf of Eaton Elementary School and all parents of students across DCPS, I call on the D.C. Council to reject Mayor Bowser's budget cuts. Each staff member matters. Cutting funding will lead to a coarsening of the social fabric we work hard each day to maintain.

Respectfully yours,

Gideon Culman, Eaton Elementary School LSAT Chair, Parent of Esther (K) and Isaac (3)

**DCPS Public Budget Meeting for the 2024-2025 School Year**  
**Written Testimony from the Ward 5 Education Equity Committee**  
**November 13, 2023**

Chancellor Ferebee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the DCPS budget.

The Ward 5 Education Equity Committee engages the community on issues affecting Ward 5 learners, supports Ward 5 schools in meeting their academic goals, and advocates for equitable, high-quality, community-based education. We are submitting testimony on the DCPS budget because Ward 5 schools, teachers, learners, and families need equity and transparency from the DCPS administration.

Demographics, systems-involvement, English language learner status, or disability continue to be far too closely linked with educational outcomes among DCPS schools and students. This reflects inequities rather than differences in students' curiosity or capacity to learn. As long as we continue to see these patterns hold, DCPS should prioritize increasing the resources allocated for targeted support at the school and central office levels.

Education equity needs to inform every part of the DCPS budget process—and an emphasis on equity needs to be clear from the results. Ward 5 has the third highest share of students coping with life hardships (or as OSSE refers to it “at-risk” of academic failure), the third highest share of special education students, and the fourth highest share of English language learners. The W5EEC supports these students with back to school supplies, a winter coat drive, and informational support for their families and caregivers. But we cannot make up for the budget gap between the resources needed for these students to succeed and the resources their schools have for their education and social-emotional needs.

In its school budgets, DCPS can ensure that a larger share of funds goes to helping our students thrive even if they are carrying a heavier load than some of their other classmates. If DCPS's allocation of funds between enrollment-based and targeted funds is not closing the gap enough, we may need to shift a greater share of school funds toward support for ELL, special education, and at-risk statuses.

We recently asked our members about their top education equity priorities. The top three concerns were school safety, special needs resources, and school budget oversight. This shows a clear desire from Ward 5 residents and parents of scholars that investing in education equity provides a better education environment for scholars, teachers, and families. All of these factors are related, and we ask DCPS to budget for both the safety and educational success of Ward 5 students—and all DC scholars whose potential is left on the table by our systems far too early.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

The Ward 5 Education Equity Committee

Chair - Loretta Thompson

Vice-Chair - Qubilah Huddleston

Treasurer - Emily Stiever

Recording Secretary - Maya Brennan

Communications Officer - Brianna McGowan

Parliamentarian - Sherice Muhammad



Seaton Elementary PTO  
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**TESTIMONY OF THE SEATON ES PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION  
BEFORE THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)  
ON THE STATUS OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 (SCHOOL YEAR 2024-2025) BUDGET  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2022**

We write on behalf of Seaton Elementary School’s Parent Teacher Organization. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning DCPS’ budgeting practices and how they have impacted our school.

As you know, Seaton is a Title I school located in the heart of the city, serving students in the Shaw and Truxton Circle neighborhoods along with many students who have lotteried in due to its reputation. Over the years, through the incredible work of our teachers and administration, we have seen a big increase in enrollment, as more families have chosen to stay in the city and send their kids to their neighborhood school. Not only is this great for our community and DCPS, but it also has many positive impacts on the city. And this Council’s decision to allocate funds for a new Center City Middle School has deepened our community’s commitment to staying at the school even through the upper grades.

Seaton is exactly the kind of school that the city should celebrate. We are one of the most diverse schools in the city, with significant Black, Latino, and AAPI populations. In 2023, Seaton became the first D.C. public school to receive a Human Rights Campaign’s “Welcoming Schools” designation, highlighting how we have created a safe and welcoming school for LGBTQIA+ students and families. And we serve a large population of students who are experiencing homelessness, receive TANF benefits, or are in the foster care system. We are so proud of our school, and we want to continue to excel and provide opportunities to all of the amazing children who walk through the doors every day– no matter their background.

**Unfortunately, DC’s budgeting process threatens to undo all of the progress Seaton has made over the last decade.** For this school year, our enrollment increased from 353 to 383 students—roughly an 8% jump, outpacing DCPS’ enrollment projections. Rather than rewarding our increased enrollment, our funding has

been cut for three consecutive years, making it difficult to support the resources we need to keep up with our student population.

- For example, for SY 2023-2024, nearly all of our rising Kindergarten families chose to remain at Seaton, and several more enrolled over the summer, so that we now have 53 Kindergartners. However, given our limited resources, we only have enough teachers to staff two Kindergarten classrooms. **This means that there is only one teacher and one aide responsible for up to 27 five to six year olds, many of whom have special needs or are non-native English speakers.** Kindergarten is a critical year for academic growth. Given the needs of our school population, this is not sustainable and threatens our Kindergartners' ability to learn.
- This problem will continue to multiply; we currently have three 18-student PK4 classrooms. Thus, unless our budget increases, we'll have the same issue again in Kindergarten, and this year's Kindergartners will suffer from another year of overcrowding when they become 1<sup>st</sup> graders.
- Our specialized teaching staff are facing enormous demands on their time as they fill in the gaps for lack of full time positions.

These issues are only going to continue, as Seaton is expected to see enrollment increase to over 400 students next year. It is imperative that we see budget increases commensurate with our enrollment increases, or those increases will quickly evaporate. Without action, we fear the consequences to our school and others like it.

**First, faced with overcrowded classrooms, families will leave.** We are already hearing from families, particularly in PK-4 and Kindergarten, who are upset about the lack of funding for a third classroom. These families also see that, without action from DCPS they are facing the exact same issue next year. It is in this Council's interest to retain families in the District's downtown core, and the best way to do that is ensure that our children can receive a top-notch education at their neighborhood school. Without adequate funding to staff enough classrooms, Seaton will be in jeopardy to maintain its high standards.

**Second, without adequate staffing, teachers will leave.** Seaton is nothing without our wonderful teachers, many of whom have remained here for many years. But without adequate resources to staff our classrooms, our teachers are facing increased risk of burnout. Many of our classrooms are seeing historically high levels of students without any increase in help. And our special education and ELL teachers are being asked to bear more and more of a burden to split time across multiple grade-levels and classrooms just to keep up with the demands of our school population. In particular, Seaton educates a large immigrant population, who have their own unique needs. It is imperative that we retain our dedicated staff with experience working with this population, which we cannot do if our budget continues to be cut.

We want to highlight these concerns as DCPS reviews future budgeting practices. As parents and caregivers, we want Seaton to remain the joyful, loving, and nurturing place it is for our children and their classmates. For many of us, a strong public school is the reason we have stayed in the city while we have watched so many of our peers move to the Maryland or Virginia suburbs.

We urge you to consider the long-term benefits of a budget increase for our public schools. By doing so, we can create an educational system that empowers our students, supports our teachers, and strengthens our



community as a whole. Together, we can ensure that our schools have the resources they need to provide a high-quality education for all.

Thank you for your time and commitment to the well-being of our public schools.

Sincerely,

Seaton ES Parent Teacher Organization

Zandria Haines, Seaton PTO President

**Phoebe Koenigsberg**  
**Whittier Elementary School**

My name is Phoebe Koenigsberg, and I am a parent of a Pre-K 3 and First Grader at Whittier Elementary School in Ward 4. The school is due to be modernized and swing to Sharpe Health in the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 academic years. I would like DCPS to allocate funding towards finding or building swing space in the current neighborhood to keep our students in a strong, successful environment near their homes.

Sharpe Health is over two miles from the current school location, and the distance, lack of parking, and lack of public transportation make it extremely difficult for students, parents, teachers, and staff to get to the location, even with the two school buses that will make the trips each day. Whittier risks losing student enrollment, losing teachers during a teacher shortage crisis, and losing parent participation in school activities. Older siblings who attend Ida B. Wells Middle School and Coolidge High School, both across the street from Whittier, won't be able to walk their younger siblings to school when parents have to get to work. These are undue burdens for current elementary school students and their families and will negatively impact our youngest students' ability to learn.

So what can the DCPS budget do for our school next year? It can allocate financial resources toward reserving and building temporary modular spaces in the available DPR field space behind Coolidge High School. There is precedent for doing so when swing space is unacceptable, such as when Coolidge was modernized and DCPS built modular spaces directly next door. King Elementary and Drew Elementary will also be using modular spaces during their modernizations.

Additionally, the Ward 4 population is exploding with school aged children, and it would serve DCPS well to invest in acquiring buildings, spaces, or land to use for additional school needs in the coming years. Many people and families move to particular neighborhoods when the schools are performing well, and our neighborhood will likely suffer as a consequence of Whittier moving to a swing location far away for two years.

Good neighborhood schools are cornerstones of strong and healthy communities. Quality schools enhance property values, build social networks among neighbors and local businesses, and provide spaces for community events, meetings, and activities. All people and businesses thrive because people care about the education of the children who grow up there, even if those children are not their own.

I ask you to please think ahead to the potential damage you would do to the neighborhood around Whittier if you don't keep Whittier students close to their current school location. Dedicate funding toward investigating, leasing, buying, or creating educational space near the current school so our students can continue to be successful in their studies.

## **Luther Hoy**

### **Jackson-Reed HS**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Luther Hoy and I am a senior at Jackson-Reed High School and I live in Ward 3. I am heavily involved with theater at my school, and had the honor of being an assistant director for our fall play *She Kills Monsters*. I hope to attend college for public policy and government, and directing has given me a space to enhance vital leadership skills, public speaking, and creative thinking. I am testifying on the repairs needed in the Jackson Reed Auditorium – which is currently unusable for theatre productions, forcing us to perform in the rundown, much smaller black box. Last year, we were successfully granted by the Committee to allocate \$550,000 in the DGS budget to address ongoing equipment failures and problems with the space, like acoustics, we are dealing with in the auditorium. The Jackson-Reed Theater Program was promised by DGS that construction would start in the month of October this year so that it could be used for the upcoming spring musical, however, this has not been the case. In fact, a contractor has not even been hired, a process that should have happened over the summer. Currently, there are 550,000 dollars just sitting there, and an auditorium in disrepair.

Our large theater department, comprised of over 250 students, should produce in a suitable large performance space. However, due to the auditorium's current condition, our theater department has been forced to relocate in our black box theater, a space that is intended to only be used as a classroom and host student-led theater projects. This makes the performance space much smaller which is detrimental to large amounts of students who want to be involved.

One of the best parts of being a part of these productions during my sophomore year in the auditorium was that there was no fear of rejection - everyone was able to perform in the show with such a large theater! Participating in the ensemble of *Les Miserables* was one of the best couple months of my life, even if my role would be considered minimal to the onlooker. In reality, the ensemble of a show is the most important group that makes these high-scale productions come together and generates the most community building.

Moving into a much smaller performing stage, cast sizes had to be cut down, something that I had to grapple with as an assistant director. This created a much more competitive environment and eliminated the welcoming, community-building theater I knew at the beginning of my sophomore year. Furthermore, performing in a smaller space cuts down on the number of people in an ensemble, which, as I said before, is the most important piece of a show. Working in a smaller environment has left us feeling stressed, overwhelmed, angry, and quite frankly, unfriendly. I miss the culture we had when new-to-theater Luther was able to join with no difficulty and have a substantial role. I miss the opportunity to work in a larger, much more collaborative environment. And most of all, I miss the ensemble.

DGS has not fallen through with their promises last year and must take immediate action for the auditorium to be repaired. On behalf of the theater community at my school, I ask for DGS to act now on using the 550,000 allocated to bring the Jackson-Reed Auditorium back to life.

**Kathleen Cochrane’s Testimony Regarding Seaton Elementary and Other Public School Funding concerns—November 16, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony, Chairman and Council Members. My name is Kathleen Cochrane and my husband Sri Katragadda and I moved from Manhattan to Shaw in 2014, because even as we left New York, we still wanted to live in a vibrant, central city community. We welcomed our first daughter Pearl in 2015 and our younger daughter Ruby in 2017. Both of our kids have attended Seaton Elementary School beginning with Pre-K3. Pearl is now in second grade, with math being her favorite subject, and Ruby is in first grade, working on reading with her fabulous teacher Ms. Kirsten Taylor, who was one of only a handful of teachers nationwide who has been named a Goyen Foundation Literacy Fellow this year for her work on the science of reading.

My husband and I are very concerned about the budget challenges facing Seaton in particular and other Ward 2 schools, as well. Seaton’s enrollment has been growing even faster than DCPS projections, and yet funding has been cut. This has resulted in overly crowded classrooms, a problem that is most acute at the kindergarten level, where 50 students were divided into only 2 classes. This is above the “20 children per class” policy and has caused a great deal of concern among kindergarten parents that their children are not receiving enough individualized attention at a critical time in their growth and development. We need sufficient funding so we can meet the increasing demand, hire more excellent teachers like Ms. Taylor, and keep families in our local public schools.

We also think it’s critically important to increase funding to Seaton in order to provide enrichment activities during afterschool programs. Seaton is a Title I school with a significant population of underprivileged children and children of immigrant families. We are currently not able to provide enrichment programs that would do much to help kids who would be greatly benefited by such programming, and all students at Seaton.

Finally, we think it’s critical to emphasize that funding must not be cut during the upcoming Seaton modernization, when we will be using swing space at KC Lewis, in order to avoid losing teachers and staff during a time of transition. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of these important school funding issues.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Cochrane  
[Katiecochrane1@yahoo.com](mailto:Katiecochrane1@yahoo.com)  
646-530-1440

1508 5<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001

# Whittier Modernization Relocation: Risks and Rewards of the Upcoming Swing Space Plan

Prepared by the Whittier Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization

Overview: Our objective is to encourage DCPS to reconsider the proposal to relocate Whittier Elementary School to Sharpe Health during the upcoming modernization and instead relocate the school to an alternative or modular space in the local community. We urge those responsible for these decisions - Washington D.C.'s education authorities - to consider the following facts and prioritize keeping Whittier Elementary within its community during this crucial period.

- **Whittier Elementary is a special place worth preserving and protecting**
  - Whittier Elementary is a great neighborhood school with an amazing community of teachers and families. ***We love this community and overwhelmingly support remaining in the neighborhood!***
  - Its success is strongly linked to its physical location. Proximity to the community it serves cannot be discounted.
  - Whittier has seen growing and sustained success in test scores, student enrollment and retention, teacher and family satisfaction.
  - Whittier has been designated a Green Ribbon School by the US Department of Education.
  - One of the few schools to offer a STEM curriculum at the elementary education level.
  - Project Leads the Way (PLTW) Certified STEM program.
  
- **Risks we face in a move to Sharpe Health:** Other DC schools forced to relocate have seen decreases in teacher retention, overall enrollment, and damage to school culture and educational outcomes. .
  - **We risk losing teachers.** The entire country is suffering from a shortage of qualified teachers. We can ill afford to lose the expertise, experience and school culture that our teachers have built over many years. Our teachers support staying in the community. This is an opportunity to listen to teachers and support them.
  - **We risk losing families and students.** Our school is not just a building; it's a vital part of our local community. It's where our children learn, grow, and form lifelong friendships. The burden of a Sharpe relocation will inevitably cause some families to leave the Whittier community, as well as discourage new families from entering for the next 4+ years. A vast majority of families surveyed indicated that a Sharpe relocation would make them more likely to leave Whittier, and many said they would consider leaving DC for better educational opportunities
  - **We risk losing existing gains and current successes.** Loss of enrollment means a loss of programs and funding. If we lose students, we jeopardize the funding that provides for the great programming that Whittier is known for. It puts at risk jobs, extra curricular opportunities, special education resources and the science and technology curriculum.
  
- **Undue burden and negative consequences faced by our community during a Sharpe Swing**
  - Most Whittier families walk to Whittier. Sharpe Health is around 2.2 miles south and well outside of the school zone. Walking kids to school not only promotes physical activity but also fosters valuable bonding time and teaches them road safety skills, creating a safer and healthier start to the day. It also allows for parents to engage with the broader community and enhances engagement.

- Limited public transit options could add AN HOUR OF COMMUTING TIME per day. Surveys indicate that families would primarily be forced to drive their children to Sharpe, adding to congestion, carbon emissions, pollution and higher financial burdens. Long commute times for students have been proven to negatively impact physical and mental health as well as educational performance.
  - There is limited parking near Sharpe to accommodate teacher needs. Many of our teachers live outside the district and would be subject to longer commutes
  - For years, Whittier teachers enrolled their own young children in daycare facilities near the school, many handing off daycare spots to other Whittier teachers.
  - DCPS provided school buses are not a reasonable solution. Accommodating over 400 students and teachers, including PreK students as young as 3, is not a realistic or cost effective alternative.
  - Many families have older siblings who attend Ida B Wells MS or Coolidge HS and rely on siblings for pickup and dropoff.
  - According to data from The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF), students perform better academically when they have stability in their learning environment (NCEF). Furthermore, studies show that strong community schools contribute significantly to local economies and social cohesion (American Federation of Teachers).
- **We have better options available that will keep Whittier close to home.**
    - This neighborhood is blessed with DC owned open spaces that could be used to construct a modular school. Temporary reallocation of a small portion of DPR space at the Takoma Recreation Center near Whittier would have minimal impact to their operations and services.
    - The explosion of growth of the population in Ward 4, especially the population of school age children, will require a reevaluation of the long term educational facility needs. A modular swing space or acquiring additional DCPS facilities could have long term benefits to add much needed capacity in the Ward and District.
    - There is precedent for constructing modular space when swing space is not acceptable. DCPS knows how to do this. Coolidge High School modernization utilized an extensive modular space right next door. King Elementary and Drew Elementary are currently planning on utilizing modular space for upcoming modernization.
- **Strong neighborhood schools benefit the entire community**
    - A good neighborhood school is a cornerstone of a thriving community. It fosters a sense of unity, providing a common ground for residents to come together and support a shared cause—the education and well-being of their children. Quality neighborhood schools not only enhance property values, making the community an attractive place to live, but also serve as hubs for community activities, meetings, and events. They help build strong social networks, encourage civic participation, and promote a collective sense of pride. In essence, a good neighborhood school benefits the entire community by fostering an environment where families flourish, businesses prosper, and residents are deeply connected, contributing to the overall vitality and well-being of the neighborhood.

To: DCPS Chancellor Dr. Lewis Ferebee

From: The Whittier Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

Re: Reconsideration of the Upcoming Modernization Plan for Whittier Elementary School

Date: November 17, 2023

Dear Chancellor Farabee,

We trust this letter finds you well. We are writing to express our concerns and advocate for the reconsideration of the decision to relocate Whittier Elementary School to the swing space at Sharpe Health during the upcoming modernization, and instead to find an alternative space that keeps Whittier in the community it serves.

We ask that you work with all necessary DC educational authorities and agencies and, in partnership with our community, come up with an alternative plan that meets the needs of the school and satisfies the growing need for educational resources in our community.

Whittier Elementary is not merely a place of education; it is a cornerstone of our community, contributing to its identity and fostering a sense of belonging among students, parents, and residents. Relocating the school would disrupt the established bonds and could negatively impact the academic and social well-being of the students.

The proposed plan involves moving our students to a distant location during the 2 year renovation period. This will disrupt their learning environment and strain families who rely on nearby schooling for their children. It has the potential to exacerbate existing social and economic inequities in our community, as those families further from opportunity will struggle most with the burden of a long commute. Furthermore, studies show that strong community schools contribute significantly to local economies and social cohesion (American Federation of Teachers).

Whittier is an award winning school, recognized in DC and nationally for its success and achievement. The school has seen measurable growth in enrollment, test scores and parent satisfaction, the only negative is our aging building. A burdensome move puts all those gains at risk. We risk losing teachers, we risk losing families and we risk losing out on a generation

of growth and successes. (Please see the attached memo for a detailed summary of the risks and potential solutions)

Sharpe Health is simply unacceptable for Whittier. It is too far away (2.2 miles) and the risks to the school and surrounding community are too great. We polled families and caregivers, and they resoundingly rejected the idea of relocating to Sharpe. Here are a few of the highlights\*.

- *97% of respondents said it would be a major or minor disruption*
- *77% said they would consider changing schools if forced to go to Sharpe*
- *35% of respondents said losing their neighborhood school would cause them to consider leaving the District altogether*
- *60% of Whittier families walk or bike as their primary mode of getting to school, with 90% walking at least part time.*

*\*source: online poll conducted by the Whittier PTO in October 2023*

We see from our polling results that there is virtually no support for a move to Sharpe. The school community, including parents and teachers, clearly supports an alternative that would keep Whittier in the immediate neighborhood; and we are lucky enough to have several alternative spaces within sight of Whittier.

There are alternatives that can keep our school in its community during this process. Modular space or closer alternative spaces can be utilized to ensure minimal disruption while still achieving modernization goals. Alternative land or facility acquisition could also support long term facility planning needs and provide ample opportunity to serve a Ward that is seeing an explosion of growth in the school age population and the corresponding education needs.

We ask that you work with school administrators and the school community, represented by the PTO, to develop an alternative plan that satisfies the need to modernize our building while also preserving our school community.

Sincerely,

The Parents, Teachers and Families of the Whittier Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)



DCPS FY25 Public Budget Hearing  
Testimony by Lauren Welsh

My name is Lauren Welsh and I have children at Stoddert Elementary School and Hardy Middle School, and I am the Chair of Stoddert's LSAT. My oldest is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Hardy, and my youngest is three years old and has not yet entered the DCPS system.

I have been a member of Stoddert's LSAT for the last five years, and I would like to share my experience navigating the budget process, and in particular the ramifications of the new budget model. I want to urge DCPS to adhere to the Schools First in Budgeting (SFIB) Act as required by law, and **not to reduce funding to DCPS schools** through the elimination of the one-time funding streams from last year's school budgets. In addition, it is critical to have an organized budget process with clear deadlines communicated in advance that allows for schools to be able to reflect and respond in a way that is thoughtful and timely.

Though the budget process can often be challenging, particularly when there is a loss of funding, last year's budget deliberation was especially wrenching. In our initial budget, Stoddert had lost nearly \$300K in funding, despite a very small decrease in enrollment of only 6 students. Though some grades were slightly smaller than our normal cadre, other grades were much larger (for example, there are currently 96 2<sup>nd</sup> graders).

As we deliberated how to make these cuts in a way that would minimize the impact to students while providing consistency and preserving flexibility, we were looking at letting go of a number of long-time staff members who have been part of the Stoddert community for longer than I have been a parent of children at Stoddert. It was a heart-breaking process, and acutely so as Stoddert also experienced the unexpected death of a beloved first grade teacher at the beginning of the short window in which we had to respond to the budget. (I'll address my concerns regarding the budget process below).

We were ultimately able to avoid making as significant of cuts as we had initially expected because DCPS granted one-time petitions in the amount of \$150K submitted by our previous principal. However, these petitions were clearly framed as a one-time reprieve, and not reflective of an understanding by DCPS of the significance of the cuts and the flaws in the budget model. We have no assurances such petitions would be granted next year.

In addition to being concerned over whether such petitions would be granted, Stoddert's final budget also included \$380K in one-time Mayor's Recovery Funds, and it is unclear whether DCPS intends to cut these funds, or adhere to the SFIB Act next year. To date, DCPS has signaled its intent to eliminate funds characterized as

“one-time Mayor’s Recovery Funds.” For Stoddert, the petitions plus the Mayor’s Recovery Funds amounted to \$530K.

While we are protected from losing more than 5% of our annual budget, it is confusing and alarming to enter the budget season without knowing whether we will have thousands of dollars cut from our budget. I strongly urge DCPS to adhere to the SFIB Act and to clarify their intent not to cut school-level funding as soon as possible.

Beyond not just cutting funds, I believe DCPS needs to increase the amount of money allocated per student in the general funding stream. At Stoddert and at Hardy, schools are forced to make do with insufficient funding, leading to inadequate school supplies large class sizes and other consequences that impact student learning. I commend DCPS’s efforts to boost spending on those students most in need, and believe additional funding for special education, ELL and at-risk students should be additional, on top of an increased allocation from general funding.

Additionally, budgets need to consider the impact of how inflation reduces the purchasing power of the same dollars each year. The same staff and same supplies cost more every year, so even if the budget remains the same, and the school’s enrollment remains the same, schools lose purchasing power and are forced to make cuts. On top of that, the pay raises secured through the new WTU contract were covered separately from last year’s budget cycle, but it seems likely that these increased costs would come out of the school-level funding for FY25. Therefore, each school requires additional funding to afford these deserved pay raises without having to make further cuts to afford them.

Finally, there is much room to improve the current budget process. In the five years I have served on Stoddert’s LSAT, DCPS has released the budget right before the February break, requiring school administrators, staff and parent volunteers on the LSAT to sacrifice their leave (during which children are out of school and potentially on vacation) to hurriedly meet and discuss the initial budget and staffing decisions. DCPS provides *less* than two weeks for administrators to respond to the initial budget, make petitions and finalize staffing decisions. Surely DCPS can be more respectful of its staff and volunteers by not releasing the budget immediately before a break, or under such a compressed turnaround time. Last year, Stoddert was dealing with the sudden loss of a beloved staff member concurrent to the window for responding to the budget, and though Stoddert’s principal asked for an extension, none was granted. I would hope DCPS could show more flexibility and grace if another school were to find themselves in such a situation.

Thanks to the DC Council, Stoddert’s lost funding was restored with the budget approved by Council in June 2023. And Stoddert has taken advantage of this funding to restore the lost positions and make some long-term investments in programs that were never properly funded by DCPS. For example, with the loss of Fillmore School,

Stoddert was expected to, in a year, develop art and music programs within its walls in a year, with no additional funding that would have allowed us to purchase instruments or art supplies.

We are incredibly grateful to the DC Council for this funding.

But relying upon Council's intervention to correct the shortfalls in the DCPS budget should **not** become part of the DCPS budget process. Schools should not be forced to make cuts to long-time staff members during the budget season, only to have those positions restored months later by Council. Schools should not be forced to depend upon petitions for last-minute funding interventions to ensure consistency in staffing from year-to-year. DCPS should want to attract and retain high-quality staff, and being able to provide budgetary consistency from one year to the next seems central toward achieving that goal.

We urge DCPS to provide the budgetary consistency intended by the SFIB Act and not to eliminate the money allocated from one-time funding in school budgets. **We urge DCPS to increase school funding, not reduce it.** Please provide consistency and predictability in school-level funding, for Stoddert, Hardy, and all schools within DCPS.

Thank you for your time and consideration.