

HOPES AND DREAMS

FOR EQUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)

**RESEARCH REPORT OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS
FROM THE DCPS HOPES AND DREAMS CAMPAIGN**



**PREPARED BY:
KIMBERLEY FREEMAN, PH.D.,
LINELL EDWARDS, AND
FAUN ROCKCLIFFE**

SEPTEMBER 13, 2011



**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

HOPES AND DREAMS

FOR EQUALITY AND EXCELLENCE

IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)

This report presents findings from analysis of qualitative data collected from approximately 8,500 DCPS stakeholders about their hopes and dreams for the school district. The report describes the hopes and dreams of DCPS stakeholders for the school system, for schools, and for students. Within each section, hopes and dreams are listed in rank order in terms of the importance and frequency with which respondents described them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS SYSTEM	3
• AN EXCELLENT AND EQUAL DCPS	8
• HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS SCHOOLS	3
• HAPPY SCHOOLS: POSITIVE, FUN SCHOOL CLIMATE	3
• A RIGOROUS AND RICH ACADEMIC PROGRAM	4
• BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN AND MODERN FACILITIES	5
• HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS: CARING, COMMITTED, AND COMPETENT	7
• ABUNDANT FINANCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES	8
• OTHER TOP HOPES FOR SCHOOLS	8
• HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS STUDENTS	8
• HIGH-ACHIEVING	8
• ENGAGED	8
• HIGH-ACHIEVING GRADUATES	10
• HOPES AND DREAMS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND WARD	11

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS SYSTEM

☀ AN EXCELLENT AND EQUAL DCPS

Stakeholders' primary hope for DCPS was that it be an "equal" school system, one that provides excellent schools for all students, families, and neighborhoods in the District. Achievement gaps and inequities are eliminated in the dream school system. In addition, stakeholders imagined a DCPS administration that properly, efficiently and fairly governed the school district, with clear and transparent communication, and was not steered by politics but was trustworthy and on one accord with schools, teachers, students, and families. Finally, stakeholders envisioned a DCPS central administration that fulfilled its vital role of providing the needed support to schools, teachers and families, and especially providing a common, clear curriculum with common, clear standards that are aligned with assessments.

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS SCHOOLS

The following five themes identified from the data, are presented here in order of frequency heard. In other words, the first theme was the theme represents the sentiment most frequently heard, the second theme was the next most commonly expressed and so on down the list.

☀ #1- HAPPY SCHOOLS: POSITIVE, FUN SCHOOL CLIMATE

The foremost hope for DCPS was to have schools that are welcoming, happy, fun, nurturing, motivating, friendly, disciplined and safe places (see Figure 1). Across all stakeholder groups, the primary dream was that all schools be positive contexts that are student-centered, learning-focused, supportive and filled with high expectations for success. Schools would also be places where all children and adults are respectful and inclusive of each other. Schools would be a community, or a family, for all.

*I am greeted by smiling pleasant teachers and administrators. I see happy, smiling children.
The environment feels warm, receptive and inviting.
The classrooms are clean and designed for learning
with seating configured to facilitate classroom
interaction.* DCPS school-based employee

*The schools are bright and lively. Students are
speaking freely, no silent classrooms in this school.
There is technology in every classroom, being used
on interdisciplinary projects that challenge the
students creatively while also requiring mastery of
basic skills. The teachers are excited by constantly
trying to challenge their students in new ways and are
pushed themselves in a similar way by their principal.*
Community member

*The sense of community within the school. How
culturally stimulating the environment of the school is.
The level of interaction between students, teachers and
school staff in general.* DCPS parent/family member

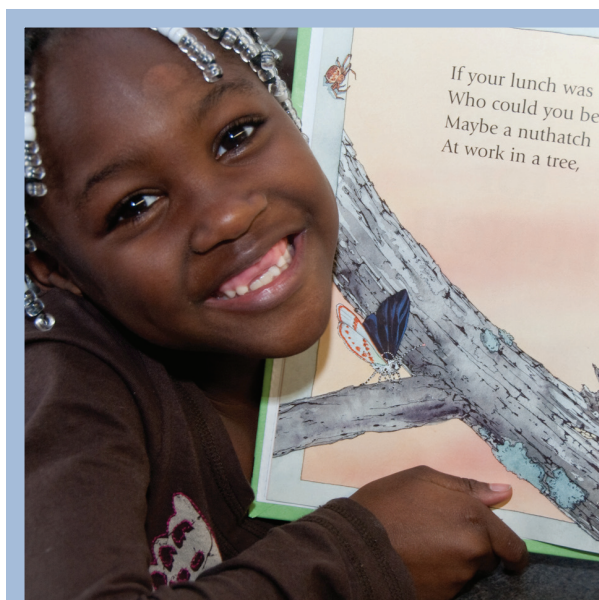
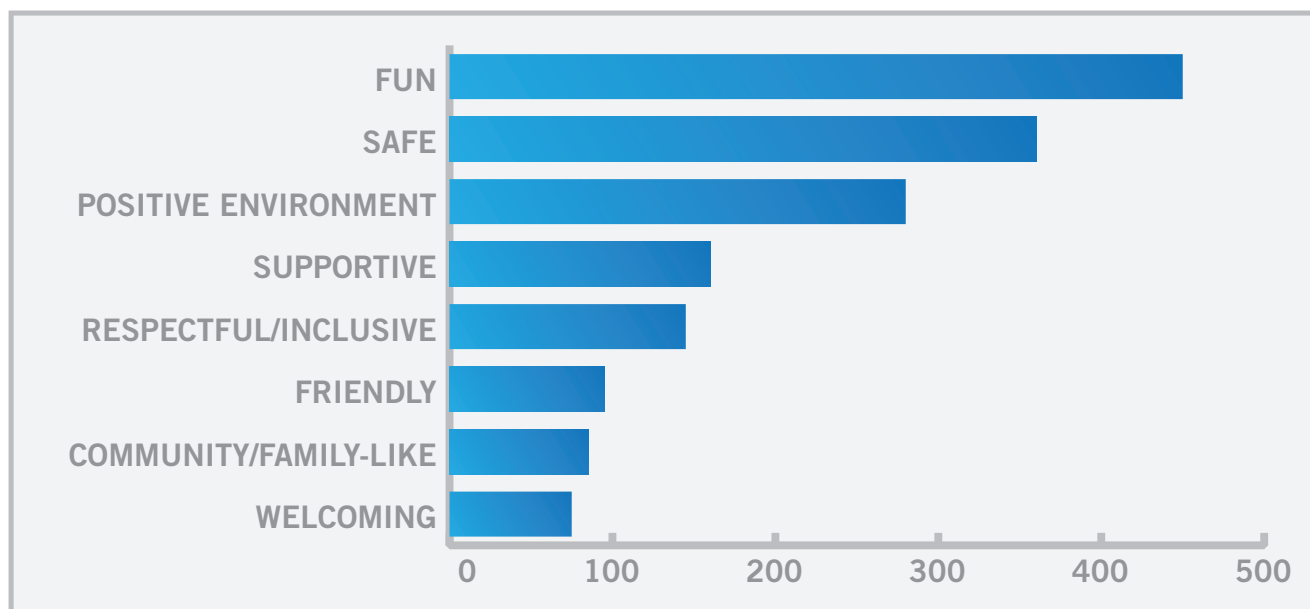


PHOTO: MEAGAN GAY

Figure 1. Top Dimensions of School Climate Hoped for By DCPS Stakeholders



✶ #2- A RIGOROUS AND RICH ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The second leading hope and dream for stakeholders was that all DCPS schools of the future provide a rigorous, interdisciplinary academic program that is rich with a diversity of program offerings. It was a primary hope by many that all schools would have high quality academics in science, math, reading, writing, language arts and foreign languages combined with music, arts, physical education, extracurricular activities, field trips, and vocational training. In particular, better and more physical education and athletics in schools (and the facilities to have them) were the dream of many, many stakeholders. In addition, high-quality, appropriate and inclusive special education was a hope for the future of DCPS. Finally, stakeholders dreamed that the academic program of DCPS would not be heavily focused on standardized testing.

With a rigorous and rich academic program, stakeholders hoped DCPS schools would be top performing schools in the district, nation and world.

These hopes and dreams for the academic program were expressed by many:

The teachers are teaching a well-rounded curriculum that integrates arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences together and challenges all students, with creative and flexible methods. Teachers and staff are challenged but enriched and inspired to do their best work. DCPS parent/family member

Rich, challenging debate. Discussion of meaningful topics; all students learning and achieving at a high level in diverse, integrated schools; engagement with current events, the arts, culture –not test prep.
DCPS Central Office Employee

Teachers have abundant resources, including good curriculum frameworks that are closely aligned with academic standards and with testing. But the idea of testing has expanded, and students can show what they know through multiple ways, including but not limited to standardized tests. School staffs have been trained in how to effectively use portfolios, student exhibitions and other products.... Schools themselves have been restructured: so that teachers, principals and staff have time in the school day/during the school year to collaborate, to get expert training, to share resources, to work with outside partners.

DCPS Alumnus, Business/Non-profit Community Member

Fun because each child has a computer; science lab so we can dissect frogs; school clubs (cooking, art, recycling). DCPS Student

World-class academics, stressing 'global citizenship'; diversity of academic offering across schools.

Respondent unknown

✶ #3- BEAUTIFUL, CLEAN AND MODERN FACILITIES

DCPS stakeholders wished for beautiful school buildings that are colorful, vibrant, open spaces, decorated with student work. The primary hope was that school facilities would be modern, clean, well-maintained, and ample spaces that are comfortable, 21st century learning environments for students and adults.

Many stakeholders dreamed of new, beautiful schools:

This school is a 21st century model school with up-to-date resources, adequate building, modern library media center, computer lab, and qualified personnel.

DC Government Employee

The building is beautiful and well-maintained, with flexible, clean, well-equipped spaces that suit the varying needs of the students and teachers. It feels light and bright and encourages teachers and students to be curious and creative. The teachers are teaching a well-rounded curriculum that integrates arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences together and challenges all students, with creative and flexible methods. Teachers and staff are challenged but enriched and inspired to do their best work.

DCPS parent/family member



PHOTO: ANDY LE

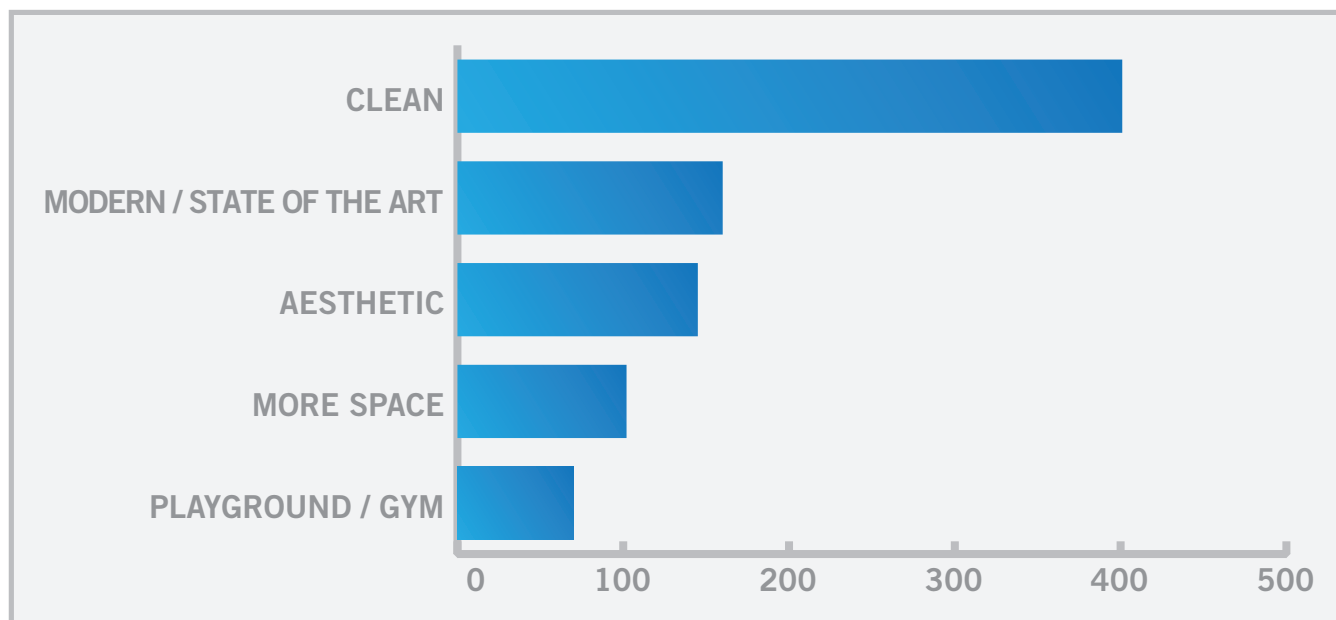
The building is beautiful and well-maintained, with flexible, clean, well-equipped spaces that suit the varying needs of the students and teachers. It feels light and bright and encourages teachers and students to be curious and creative. DCPS parent / family member

The school is a welcoming, eco-friendly environment... Facilities are clean and well-maintained. Students are involved in keeping the school clean, decorating the halls with sample assignments, and gardening as a part of biology lessons.

DCPS prospective parent/family member, community member, Business/non-profit community member

Figure 2 shows the aspects of school facilities that DCPS stakeholders dreamed for the most. Of note, facilities to support physical education and athletics, such as playgrounds, gymnasiums, and fields, were a specific type of facility that was a top hope.

Figure 2. Type of Facilities Hoped for by DCPS Stakeholders



☀️ #4- HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS: CARING, COMMITTED, AND COMPETENT

The fourth top hope that stakeholders wished for was dedicated, highly effective teachers who loved their students and their profession. In DCPS schools of the future, teacher morale is high and positive; teachers have good relationships with each other, school leaders, families, and of course students; and, teachers are committed, caring and supportive of students. Most importantly, teachers are masters of the subjects they teach and how to teach it to students.

Teachers would use a variety of instructional strategies to provide students multiple learning opportunities, including instructional technology, hands on/experiential education, differentiated instruction, individualized instruction, cooperative learning groups, culturally responsive teaching, and project based instruction. Moreover, stakeholders hoped teachers would no longer “teach to the test” but instead would be focused on using innovative instruction that supports students’ learning, growth and interests. Finally, the effectiveness of teachers would be fairly and fully assessed. It was hoped that teachers would be given the appropriate support, value, resources, professional development and performance evaluations to fully equip them to do their jobs effectively and therefore increase teacher retention.

Teachers are assessed based on the rigor of their curriculum, portfolios of student mastery, observations of their teaching, assessment of their relationships with students, educational and professional accomplishments such as awards or continuing education, and on their contributions to the school community. We have dropped the emphasis on one standardized test score being so important to their performance. DCPS parent/family member

I imagine teachers collaborating with each other to provide high-quality, rigorous instruction that challenges and engages students in learning.... I imagine that teachers are successful in pushing student achievement to thrive in the 21st century.

DCPS school-based employee

I see passionate teachers that are teaching interesting customized lessons not driven by federal standardized testing...so teachers can use their creativity and imaginations in lesson planning and not have to use cookie cutter curriculum. I see passionate students eager to learn...fueled by the teachers passion. Students and teachers are missing less days because not only is learning and teaching fun, but they are proud to spend their day in a beautiful, modern school facility that makes them feel positive, stay healthy, and helps them achieve.

DCPS prospective parent/family member



PHOTO: BEL PEREZ-GABILONDO

☀ #5- ABUNDANT FINANCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Having accessible and abundant resources to deliver a high quality program was a top hope and dream. In particular, greater and better technology was the most hoped for resource, as well as resources in general, financial resources, and curricular materials and supplies. Having adequate staff was also hoped for, including teachers, counselors and tutors. As described by a DCPS school-based employee, teachers need to be fully equipped with resources to do their jobs effectively:

Students and teachers are provided with adequate supplies. Teachers are not spending hundreds of dollars out of their own pockets (or begging for donations) for even the most basic of classroom materials, or for necessary items like math manipulatives or classroom library books. Special programs that come with special supplies include enough materials for all students. Teachers are able to focus on learning because basic needs are taken care of without a whole lot of hassle.



PHOTO: MEAGAN GAY

☀ OTHER TOP HOPES FOR SCHOOLS

Stakeholders across the board hoped for greater parent involvement in schools. In addition, stakeholders also hoped for better school food: they hoped for food that was nutritious and delicious!

HOPES AND DREAMS FOR DCPS STUDENTS

☀ ENGAGED STUDENTS

The hopes and dreams for DCPS students were that they would be highly motivated, invested and active in school and their studies. Stakeholders hoped that students would be so happy at school and enjoy learning so much that they would never want to leave. Students would be autonomous, confident, curious and creative learners. In addition, it was hoped that students would be well-behaved, respectful, and have good relationships with each other and adults.

Three DCPS parents/family members and a DCPS student eloquently expressed the following:

Kids are learning core curriculum in interesting ways: through art, music, drama and science. Kids are learning creatively, in hands-on, loud, messy and fun ways. The process of learning and teaching is joyful, and kids love and respect their teachers who, in turn, treat them with love and respect. Teachers are laughing and having fun experimenting with lessons. Kids are given a level of freedom to have just a little bit of crazy time, and teachers feel valued by parents and administration.

The children are excited. They are inquisitive, engaged, and talking and thinking about the real world and using what they are learning to understand and maybe even solve real-world problems. School is broadening their worlds in a very positive way.

A productive school of the future would find small, multi-age groups working together to solve problems that they have identified. Their problem solving is guided by adults, including teachers, librarians, administrators and other professionals to whom they feel free to come with questions and suggestions. These students are given the means and the freedom to be creative -- their problem solving will take them OUTSIDE the classroom and into the real world. These students will be guided by their teachers to gain real experience by interacting with the natural world, as well as people in various walks of life. Professionals in an ideal school will be encouraged to allow their students the time that it will take to engage in true, lasting learning.... When I imagine a place and time in which education is truly taking place...I see students reading, and discussing what they are reading; I see students helping one another to figure out various ways to communicate what they know to an "outside world"; I see students taking pride in what they produce because they have learned enough about the subject to care, not just because they care about their grade.

The school is filled with children excited to learn and eager to walk in the school building. The building is full of life and excitement. I see art, music, entertainment and a variety of colors. I see bright young faces full of joy and I see young people interacting. It feels clean, fresh, almost as if you're taking a breath of fresh air. Children are raising their hands asking questions. The teacher is addressing everyone one by one. The classroom is full of conversation and children interacting. DCPS student



PHOTO: TAMESHA BENDAW



PHOTO: BEL PEREZ-GABILONDO

☀ HIGH-ACHIEVING GRADUATES

Of course, stakeholders dreamed that DCPS graduates would be high achievers and fully prepared for college, the world of work and to be contributors to society. Stakeholders shared the following hopes and dreams for DCPS graduates:

Ready for college and career. The student has mastered academic fundamentals and is ready to continue his/her education. S/he has a specific career plan in mind and is equipped to adjust as that plan evolves over time. S/he has developed a love of learning and the tools necessary to learn independently for the rest of his/her life. Business/non-profit community member

My child is receiving education that is aligned to their needs. They feel successful and supported, safe, and welcomed. And when they leave they will be prepared for the next stage of their life. Community member

Figure 3 shows the most frequently used words by stakeholders to describe what they hoped DCPS graduates would be like in the future. Larger sized words indicate greater frequency of use by stakeholders.

Figure 3. “Word Cloud” of Hoped-For Characteristics of DCPS Graduates.



☀ HOPES AND DREAMS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND WARD

Tables 1 and 2 list the top five hopes for stakeholders, by stakeholder group and ward. The results are consistent with overall findings that school climate, rigorous academic program, facilities, highly effective teachers, and resources are most hoped for. Of note, for students only, good school food was a top five hope and dream.

Table 1. Hopes and Dreams by Stakeholder Group

PRIORITY RANKING:	1	2	3	4	5
DCPS STUDENT	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	GOOD FOOD
DCPS PARENT/FAMILY	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	RESOURCES
DCPS SCHOOL BASED EMPLOYEE	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	RESOURCES	FACILITIES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
COMMUNITY MEMBER	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	FACILITIES	RESOURCES
DCPS EMPLOYEE (CENTRAL OFFICE)	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	ENGAGED STUDENTS	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	FACILITIES	PARENT INVOLVEMENT
DC GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	FACILITIES	RESOURCES

Table 2. Hopes and Dreams by Ward

PRIORITY RANKING:	1	2	3	4	5
WARD ONE	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
WARD TWO	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
WARD THREE	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	RESOURCES
WARD FOUR	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	ENGAGED STUDENTS
WARD FIVE	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
WARD SIX	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
WARD SEVEN	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	RESOURCES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS
WARD EIGHT	POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE	RIGOROUS ACADEMIC PROGRAM	FACILITIES	HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE TEACHERS	RESOURCES

TOP CONCERNS WITH DCPS

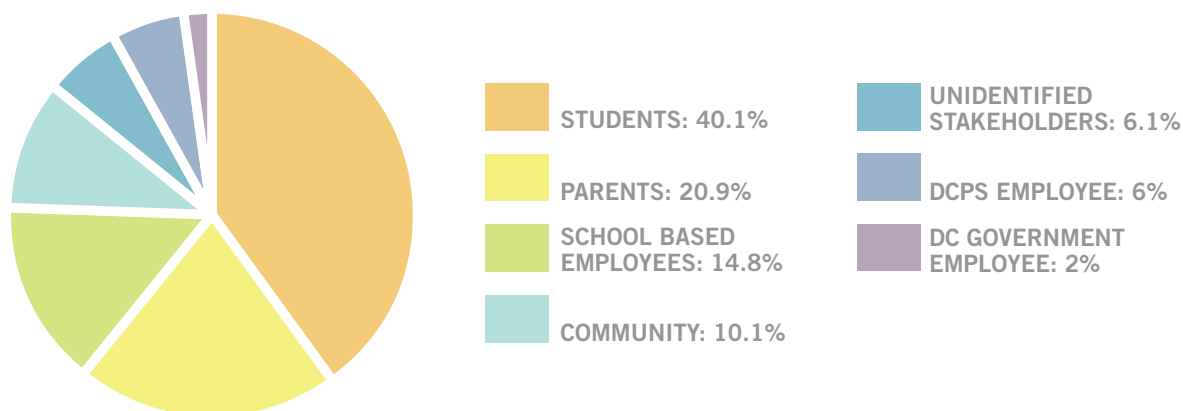
Stakeholders were also asked about their most pressing concerns with DCPS.

Table 3 lists the top 20 issues that DCPS stakeholders described. Stakeholders described financial resources as the top concern, as well as highly effective teachers, parent involvement, facilities, the IMPACT teacher evaluation system, DCPS governance and educational disparities.

Table 3. Top 20 Areas of Concern for DCPS Stakeholders

1	Financial resources	11	Technological resources
2	Highly effective teachers	12	Food
3	Parent involvement	13	General resources
4	School facilities	14	Standardized testing
5	Teacher evaluation (IMPACT)	15	Discipline
6	DCPS governance	16	Safety
7	Equality	17	School operations
8	Student achievement gap	18	Staffing resources
9	Special ed curriculum	19	Universal equity across DCPS schools
10	Rigorous curriculum	20	Student behavior

Figure 5. Hopes and dreams participants



Get involved!

Keep sharing your hopes and dreams with DCPS.

FACEBOOK

Like us on Facebook:
[Facebook.com/dcpublicschools](https://www.facebook.com/dcpublicschools)



TWITTER

Follow us
[@dcpublicschools](https://twitter.com/dcpublicschools)



TEXT MSG

Text DCPS
to 91990
to receive
mobile updates



WEB

Visit us at
<http://www.dcps.dc.gov>

