



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF DCPS: An Update from Chancellor Antwan Wilson



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



To the DC Public Schools Community,

For the past five years, DCPS has been a national model of a district on the rise. On nearly every metric, from enrollment rates to graduation rates, from student achievement to student satisfaction, we have made progress. It's easy to share the good news about DCPS because there is so much of it, and that is a testament to the educators, families, and partners who care passionately about giving our young people the opportunities they deserve.

Earlier this year, I led a citywide engagement campaign to learn about your vision for the future of DCPS. Over the past few months, we heard from more than 3,000 students, parents, educators, school leaders, and community members, who shared their experiences from every ward and every school. At all of those meetings, we asked these four questions:

How can DCPS promote excellence and equity?

What actions are important to ensure all students and families feel welcomed?

What do you hope to see as you walk into a DCPS classroom/school?

What represents success for your child, yourself, your school, and/or DCPS over the next 5-10 years?

Now, I am excited to share the feedback from those meetings. The themes included here represent the issues and priorities raised most frequently by our community, from elementary school students to city officials. I am proud of this feedback, because it reflects what we already knew: that DCPS is making incredible progress, and that we still have more work to do to become a district of both excellence and equity.

This feedback will inform the next DCPS strategic plan and the goals that will guide our next five years together. I look forward to launching that plan later this year.

We are DCPS and together, we can do this.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Antwan Wilson'.

Antwan Wilson
Chancellor, DC Public Schools

"Along with so many Washingtonians, I have watched the rise of DCPS with tremendous pride. As we put together the next five-year strategic plan, I look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders to build stronger schools at every level, in every neighborhood." – Mayor Muriel Bowser





Help All Learners Succeed

"Incorporate a curriculum that recognizes the contributions of all cultures in our global society." – Ward 5 Family/Community Member

"Children should be exposed to a wide variety of experiences and supported and challenged appropriately." – Ward 3 Family/Community Member

"Teachers should recognize when students don't understand, even when students don't speak up." – Middle School Student

"Can we provide more childcare for students who are also parents?" – Ward 1 Family/Community Member

Our shared belief in equity should drive all of our decisions and actions, including our investments. In particular, DCPS should ensure that English Learners (ELs), minority groups, immigrant families, and differently-abled students and families get the attention and resources they need to be successful.



Embrace the Whole Child

"More social-emotional and community-based support so that strong relationships can be built and problems outside of the classroom can be addressed to improve academics." – Teacher

"We should take mental health seriously. Teachers and administrators should invest in knowing what is happening outside of high school, in knowing the student and not just pushing them to graduate." – High School Student

"A lot of kids are being bullied or self-harming. We should create programs that release stress, like yoga or therapy, so they don't have to keep it all in and can focus on learning." – Middle School Student

DCPS schools should develop students' talents, not just their test scores, by helping each child find their passions, build social-emotional skills, and access "real-world" lessons. To do so, we recognize we need to attend to the social and emotional wellness of both our students and our adults.



Prepare Students for College and Career

"I want my child prepared for college and career. I don't have confidence that DCPS is doing that." – Ward 6 Family/Community Member

"Increase in high school graduation in Ward 8." – Ward 8 Family/Community Member

"Personal statement writing, scholarship applications, interview etiquette... How am I supposed to be prepared for college? I would have no idea if I did not take it on myself." – High School Student

"We need more diverse electives, like economics, to prepare us for life." – High School Student

Students should graduate DCPS schools with the preparation and tools they need to thrive in college and career. We will implement rigorous and joyful PK-12 programming with a particular focus on postsecondary readiness and increasing access, inclusivity, and excellence.



Engage Families

"We need consistent communication between schools and parents. Schools should support parent organizations and parent involvement/activities." – Ward 4 Family/Community Member

"I want people in the main office to be polite and respectful to our families." – Elementary School Student

"Engage families in their homes and communities, i.e., home visits and wrap-around services for families." – Ward 7 Family/Community Member

"My parents do not understand English. I want my teacher to be able to talk with my mom." – High School Student

Families and communities want frequent opportunities to engage at the school and district level. DCPS must communicate with families in a clear and consistent way about issues impacting their children.



"Equal is not always fair. DCPS should make sure schools receive equitable funding so that ALL schools (no matter the socio-economic status of the population) have everything that they need." – Central Office Staff Member

"All schools should provide to all students at the same level. Your zip code should not dictate your education." – Ward 2 Family/Community Member

"It shouldn't be that a school doesn't have equal technology and resources as other schools just because of where it is. All students should have the full learning experience." – Middle School Student

Give Schools What They Need

To become a district of both excellence and equity, DCPS should distribute initiatives, talent, and resources to the schools and communities that need them most, with additional attention to schools and communities in Wards 7 and 8.



Invest in People

"Give staff time to share best practices between schools. We often are disconnected from peers, even within our own school." – Teacher

"Students are more likely to come to school and go to class when we have great teachers. When our teachers take pride in us, our grades go up." – High School Student

"Provide better professional development opportunities for principals based on school-specific challenges." – School Leader

Our educators deserve meaningful support and professional development. DCPS should recruit and retain the best and most diverse talent possible for our schools, and recognize the value of male educators of color as role models.



Focus Our Work

"Stop rolling out too much at once. There is too much change to manage effectively without overwhelming people." – School Leader

"We need to shift from top-down initiatives to a feedback loop where schools give input around the priorities they are facing." – Central Office Staff

Ensure that our work is aligned and manageable so our people want to stay and our students are always the focus of our decisions.

What's Next?

We appreciate your ideas and vision. Over the summer, DCPS will use this feedback to craft a new strategic plan which will launch in September 2017. We look forward to your collaboration as we continue to conduct focus groups with families, community members, and staff. For a full summary of our engagement sessions, visit dcps.dc.gov/engage.

