

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



Performance Oversight Hearing
District of Columbia Public Schools

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

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Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Thank you to all the students, educators, parents, partners, community members, and elected officials who spoke yesterday. Our students benefit when we hear from the broader education community at forums like this.

Under Mayor Bowser’s leadership, DCPS continues to be recognized as the fastest improving urban school district in the United States.ⁱ Our work is guided by DCPS’s five-year strategic plan – A Capital Commitment.ⁱⁱ DCPS identified three priorities for our students – that they are succeeding academically, connected to school, and prepared for what is next. We also made two commitments – to value our people and partner with our community. Today, I want to share an update on results we achieved during the last year, how we got there, and where we want to go next.

Strategic Priority #1: Succeeding Academically

Earlier this month, researchers at Stanford and Harvard ranked DCPS first among states for academic recovery during the past two years.ⁱⁱⁱ Our scores on the Nation’s Report Card show meaningful gains. Our mid-year assessments show multiple measures that are above pre-pandemic levels.^{iv} While we have more work to do, DCPS students are making steady progress.

To help our students succeed academically, we are employing three tactics.

1. Improving our teacher training and supports
2. Tailoring our literacy curriculum to student needs; and
3. Providing access to high-impact tutoring

Improving Our Teacher Training and Supports

Teachers matter more to student achievement than any other factor within a school.^v That is why DCPS continues to invest in teacher training and support in core academic areas like English Language Arts and mathematics.

- DCPS operates the DC Reading Clinic, a program that offers professional development and coaching to educators in the Science of Reading. The program has offered rigorous training for over 600 educators, resources for families to support literacy at home, and was recently expanded to middle school.
- DCPS recently expanded offerings of high-quality, standards-aligned professional development in math to improve educator knowledge in operations and algebraic thinking, numeracy, and geometry. This includes a “Math for Educators” graduate certificate in partnership with Trinity Washington University and Flynn Education. Additionally, DCPS launched an elementary Math Playbook to highlight best practices for all parts of the math instructional block.

Tailoring Our Literacy Curriculum to Student Needs

Elementary schools continue to reinforce instruction grounded in the Science of Reading with several supports in place to ensure students learn to read by third grade.^{vi}

- DCPS students in grades K-5 each have a year-long curriculum of detailed learning plans including text lists, text-dependent questions, task suggestions, experiential learning opportunities, and writing practice. This curriculum is annually improved with teacher input.
- DCPS emphasizes using a multi-tiered system of support to bolster literacy outcomes. This system ensures that students struggling with literacy receive targeted interventions, while advanced learners are challenged appropriately.

Providing Access to High-Impact Tutoring

DCPS continues to invest in high-impact tutoring with the support of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and other community partners. These investments support student relationships with trusted adults, improve attendance, and lead to academic success.

- Last year, DCPS provided high-impact tutoring to over 7,000 students. And we saw results. Students were significantly more likely to perform better on state assessments.^{vii} Last year, schools continued to strengthen tutoring and embed it into the school day. For example, Moten Elementary School and Kramer Middle School have each continued to provide tutoring to all students as part of their daily schedules.
- A 2024 Stanford study found that DC students who received the required high-impact tutoring dosage were more likely to attend school and had greater academic growth than similar students.^{viii}

Strategic Priority #2: Connected to School

Student safety and well-being are paramount to a successful educational environment. That is why I am pleased to share that DCPS students are feeling more connected to school and that we continue to drive down suspensions. For the past seven years, DCPS has surveyed students about their experiences at school. This fall, more students participated in the survey than ever before. They reported a higher sense of belonging than ever before. The surveys we give are provided to students across the country and I am pleased to share that our schools are showing some of the highest scores for urban schools anywhere.^{ix} DCPS continues our decade-long priority of reducing suspensions and increasing the use of restorative practices. DCPS drove suspension days down by 60% since 2014 and this year we are seeing lower rates of serious infractions and suspensions compared to last school year. At the same time, we are increasing the use of restorative approaches, doubling the number of infractions that are addressed this way. At DCPS we are continuing to make school a place where students want to be and where they can learn safely.

Achieving a positive school climate is truly a team effort between educators at each school and our Central Services team. Educators are a major source of support for our students and their families. Thank you to all the educators for the work they are doing on behalf of DCPS students and families.

In addition to the critical day-to-day work happening in thousands of DCPS classrooms, one way our Central Services team supports students is through our Connected Schools initiative. Connected Schools are community schools – resource hubs in their community to meet student and family needs in and out of the classroom. Connected Schools take a whole child, whole school, whole community approach by making schools spaces that support not only a student’s academic development, but also a family’s overall wellbeing. Students who take advantage of ongoing

partnerships have higher attendance and families report increasing satisfaction levels at Connected Schools. Currently, 20 schools have raised their hand and adopted this model, which comes with ongoing support from DCPS's Central Services. The model is a smart investment, returning \$5 of in-kind donations and resources for every \$1 of public funds invested.^x

Strategic Priority #3: Prepared for What's Next

Whether students are entering college upon graduation, starting a career, or engaging in a combination of both, DCPS is helping them prepare for their next step. Our goal is that all DCPS students are prepared for what is next and can take advantage of bright futures. Students can access multiple pathways including career and technical education and dual enrollment. DCPS is committed to supporting students no matter the path they choose.

I am pleased to share that our graduation rates continue to improve with the highest percentage of DCPS students graduating this past year than ever before.^{xi} Our Sixth and Ninth Grade Academies are supporting students at critical transitions and leading to improved pass rates in classes and higher attendance. We have expanded offerings for career and technical education to support careers in high-demand fields like the skilled trades, health care, and finance.^{xii} More students than ever before are taking and passing advanced placement exams, providing challenging course material and college credit. Speaking of college, DCPS has robust dual enrollment offerings and university partnerships. We recently launched a free early college partnership between the University of the District of Columbia and Anacostia High School. This partnership allows high school students to take college-level courses and earn an associate degree. Dual enrollment opportunities help students complete college and earn higher wages after high school.^{xiii}

Commitment #1: Value Our People

Investing in our educators is critical to student success. On this front, we are also seeing results. DCPS has improved the retention of educators over the last decade, while increasing the size of the teacher workforce. This fall, 82% of teachers returned to their school and 89% returned to work at DCPS, significantly higher rates of retention than a decade ago. Our principals also continue to choose DCPS with 95% of principals returning to lead their school this fall. We have incredible educators like Jazzmyne Townsend, DC's teacher of the year, from our very own Stanton Elementary School. Jazzmyne is one of the four finalists for the 2025 National Teacher of the Year! She was recently profiled by WTOP where she shared about the ways she supports students academically, socially, and emotionally.^{xiv} This year, DCPS has seen the lowest teacher vacancy rate in the past 10 years, record numbers of applicants, and continued improvements to services for employees.^{xv} At DCPS, we know that when we value our people, students succeed.

Over the past four years, DCPS and our labor partners negotiated multiple agreements leading to historic pay increases and improvements to working conditions for educators. We reached agreements with the Washington Teacher's Union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the Teamsters, and the Council of School Officers. Our teachers now have an agreement that provides for the best compensation in the country and will be in place for the next three and a half years.^{xvi} We look forward to concluding negotiations for new agreements in the future and collaborating with our labor partners to ensure student success.

Commitment #2: Partner with Our Community

DCPS is committed to meaningful partnerships with our families, government agencies, local businesses, and community-based organizations. That is why we continue to engage the broader DCPS community with our annual Back to School Block Party, multiple forums on important topics like budget and the strategic plan, as well as regular meetings of my Chancellor's Advisory Boards for students, families, and educators. DCPS partners with DC Health on the School Health Services Program, with the Department of Human Services on reducing truancy, with the Metropolitan Police Department on student and community safety, and with the Department of Behavioral Health on mental health professionals in schools. Families continue to choose DCPS with over 52,000 students enrolled this fall, the highest number since 2007.^{xvii} At a time of declining public-school enrollment in districts around the country, DCPS continues to lead with enrollment gains.

Continuous Improvement

While we have much to celebrate, we can always get better. In the spirit of continuous improvement, I want to highlight two places. First and foremost, attendance. Students must be in school to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities available. While our attendance has shown steady improvement recently, rates of truancy and chronic absenteeism are unacceptably high. DCPS recently began using new analysis tools to review attendance trends and we look forward to further improvements. We will continue to provide incentives, implement home visits, train our staff, and use every available communication tool to stress the importance of regular school attendance. This challenge will take a whole-of-government approach, and we appreciate the Council's recent support for a truancy reduction pilot program at the Department of Human Services.

Second, mathematics achievement. The interrupted learning during the pandemic made it difficult for students to solidify critical foundational skills in math at multiple grade levels. While we saw significant growth on the recent NAEP assessment, improvement in math achievement needs to accelerate for our students to be truly prepared for what is next. We will continue to support students with high-impact tutoring and other interventions while participating in the OSSE's Math Task Force which will provide recommendations soon.

Conclusion

As I shared at the start of my testimony today, DCPS continues to be recognized as the fastest improving urban school district in the country. The fact is that when you look at many important metrics, we are seeing improvements at DCPS and continued excellence. Enrollment is up with more students attending DCPS than at any time since 2007.^{xviii} Student satisfaction is up.^{xix} Test scores are up.^{xx} Teacher retention is up, at the highest level in the last fifteen years besides the year interrupted by the pandemic.^{xxi} More students are demonstrating early literacy skills.^{xxii} High school graduation rates are up. Out of school suspensions are down. We continue to invest in school buildings and modernizations, ensuring high-quality and welcoming learning spaces for students.^{xxiii} More students are prepared for what is next by participating in career and technical education and early college programming.

At DCPS, our educators are talented, and our students' futures are bright. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.

ⁱ DCPS is one of twenty-six urban districts that participates in NAEP's Trial Urban District Assessment. Of those districts, DCPS was the only district to make significant or nominal improvements in all four assessments. More information is available at [Student Groups and Trend Reports – TUDA](#) and in DCPS's accompanying slides.

ⁱⁱ More information on DCPS' strategic plan is available at [2023-2028 Strategic Plan - DCPS Strong](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ More information available at [District of Columbia - Education Recovery Scorecard](#). See also [Math and reading test scores are still down, except in schools like these | AP News](#)

^{iv} At MOY24-25, 38% of students scored On Grade Level in i-Ready Math, 3 percentage points (p.p.) higher than MOY23-24 and pre-pandemic MOY performance in SY19-20. Districtwide, 66% of students scored at or above benchmark in DIBELS, 2 p.p. higher than pre-pandemic scores at MOY19-20 and last year's MOY.

^v See for example [Teachers Matter](#).

^{vi} More information on the importance of an approach grounded in the Science of Reading is available at [St. Louis Educators Learn What's Missing in How They Teach Science of Reading – The 74](#)

^{vii} Students who scored Level 1 or Level 2 on 2023 PARCC were significantly more likely to move up to a higher performance band in 2024 CAPE in both ELA and Math, compared to students with comparable baseline performance levels who didn't receive HIT.

^{viii} [D.C. kids in regular tutoring do better in school, attend more, report says | National Student Support Accelerator](#) See also [How one school is making changes to combat pandemic losses in math and reading - CBS News](#)

^{ix} DCPS provides two [surveys](#) to students annually on school climate. 28 schools scored in the 99th percentile nationally for urban elementary, middle, or high schools, along with 47 schools in the 90th percentile.

^x Education Resource Strategies analyzed the support partners provided to schools and found that partners provided direct academic support, food and health programming, mental health supports, enrichment, mentoring, and other activities. The dollars spent by those partners on these services at schools equated to \$5.16 for every \$1 spent by DCPS to staff and fund the Connected Schools model.

^{xi} In 2023, the graduation rate for DCPS was 76 percent, up from 69 percent in 2018. For more information on graduation rates, please see [High School Graduation Rates | OSSE](#).

^{xii} DCPS offers 28 CTE pathways and 38 career academies across 17 high schools and 15 middle schools, which serve over 5,000 students with the help of 120 CTE teachers. Participation in CTE improves high school completion. See [New Report Finds Positive Effects of Career and Technical Education on High School Student Achievement, College Readiness, and Postsecondary Employment](#) for more information.

^{xiii} More information on dual enrollment and its benefits is available at [Understanding Dual Enrollment](#) and [Research Priorities for Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Policy and Practice](#).

^{xiv} See [She gives kids in DC space to discuss mental health. Now, she's a national teacher of the year finalist – WTOP News](#).

^{xv} Offer letters were sent within 8 days of selection on average. This compares to 32 days two years ago.

^{xvi} See [DCPS and WTU Collective Bargaining Agreement \(2023 – 2028\) | DCPS](#) for more information.

^{xvii} See [Enrollment Audit Data | OSSE](#) for more information.

^{xviii} See [Enrollment Audit Data | OSSE](#) for more information.

^{xix} See [District Summary | DCPS | Panorama](#) for more information.

^{xx} See [2023-24 District of Columbia Statewide Assessment Results Presentation](#) for more information.

^{xxi} See DCPS's *Educator Exit Survey Report*, available at [School Data | DCPS](#).

^{xxii} Districtwide, 66% of students scored at or above benchmark in DIBELS, 2 p.p. higher than pre-pandemic scores at MOY19-20 and last year's MOY.

^{xxiii} For more information on planned modernizations, see Mayor Bowser's forthcoming Proposed Capital Improvements Plan FY26-FY31.