

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)



Public Hearing
on
Bill 24-77 - District of Columbia Public Schools Technology Equity Act of 2021

Testimony of Dr. Amy Maisterra

Deputy Chancellor

DC Public Schools

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Dr. Amy Maisterra and I serve as a Deputy Chancellor for DC Public Schools (DCPS). It is my honor to lead the District's technology infrastructure, which supports DCPS' vision for every student to feel loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life.

DCPS' ongoing efforts to ensure all DCPS students have sufficient technology, digital literacy, robust IT support, and internet access are closely aligned with the goals of the "District of Columbia Public Schools Technology Equity Act of 2021." Today I am pleased to share an update on our progress, as well as our vision for deepening this work moving forward.

Through the leadership of Mayor Bowser, and in close partnership with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), DCPS launched the Empowering Learners Initiative (ELi) in 2019. ELi is a three-year plan representing DCPS' commitment to close the digital divide and empower every learner through technology.

The launch of ELi provided us with a strong foundation when we were unexpectedly faced with the current public health emergency. Because of the building blocks in place through ELi, we were able to pivot quickly from our 3-year phased roll out plan and strategically blend local and federal funds to ensure every student in need of a device and internet connectivity at home would have equitable access throughout the District. Prior to ELi, device purchasing and management were school-based and decentralized. However, because we had adopted and standardized a centralized asset inventory system as part of ELi planning, we were able to leverage this system to quickly determine student needs and manage device distribution to homes. While in a virtual learning posture last year, we offered every student in need with an internet connection through their device or hotspot.

As of today:

- We have met our ELi goal of bringing DCPS to a 1:1 student-to-device ratio for grades 3-12 and a 3:1 ratio for grades PK-2 with the procurement, preparation, and distribution of over 50,000 devices across the portfolio.
- We have collaborated with OCTO to stand up a multilingual Family & Student Technology Call Center to support troubleshooting needs for students.
- We have ensured every teacher has a dedicated in-lifecycle device, meaning all devices are three years or newer.
- We have digitized our curriculum, learning resources, and assessments, including 200 courses spanning K-12 and every content area.
- We have deployed education technology managers to support technology integration in the classroom.

- We have expanded school-based technology support from 56 technicians pre-pandemic to 89 technicians in the current school year, prioritizing customer service improvements based on school and community feedback.
- We have standardized the role of technology controller in our schools, to ensure that OCTO technicians and central office have a single point of contact to support this initiative.

This fiscal year alone, we have made an unprecedented investment of \$38 million dollars in student and technology and invested an additional \$2.45 million to upgrade several schools' infrastructure to ensure they continue to offer reliable internet connectivity. We are working to ensure every school has outdoor Wi-Fi and are on track to complete installation in 2021 in partnership with OCTO.

Comprehensive Long-Term Technology Planning

DCPS is committed to comprehensive and equitable planning to determine our technology strategy. It is a top priority for us to publish a public technology equity plan by the fall of 2022 that we will update annually, including a detailed inventory and infrastructure for each school as well as the engagement strategies used to inform our work. We agree with the goals of this legislation and support increased transparency of our technology equity work, but we would ask Council to consider providing us more flexibility in how we develop our plans, engage our stakeholders, and report on our outcomes.

Engagement and Communication

Over the last several years, DCPS has heard from students, families, educators, and communities about technology needs in their schools and what meaningful infusion of technology with the DCPS curriculum looks like. This stakeholder feedback, along with lessons learned from 1:1 pilots in DCPS schools, informed our three year ELi plan and related investments. Additionally, since the beginning of distance learning, DCPS has been regularly gathering feedback from families about technology access and support. We have achieved this through multiple surveys at the school and central level with parents and Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs), school budget advisory groups, and regular contact with digital equity advocates. The feedback we receive directly informs our investments and programming. For example, we heard feedback from families last spring that there was a need for direct, on-demand technology support and, as a result, we worked with OCTO to stand up the multilingual Family & Student Technology Call Center noted previously. Survey responses from families indicated a need for internet access at home, so we invested over \$5 million to provide every student in need with internet access through their device or a hotspot. DCPS also shared a technology needs survey with all students in preparation for SY20-21, and we incorporated technology access questions in enrollment forms for SY21-22 to ensure we captured annual data on technology access. Last, DCPS surveyed teachers about the selection of a standard teacher device prior to procuring them.

As part of our strategic planning for the next iteration of our 5-Year Capital Commitment Plan, of which digital equity is a key pillar, we will engage with students, families, and staff to evaluate our progress, define our priorities moving forward, and set our shared goals. This planning process will launch next spring and continue through the summer. In addition, DCPS

and the Washington Teachers' Union have tentatively agreed to create a technology committee, which will provide educators and other stakeholders, including students and families, an opportunity to give input on technology standards.

Technology Needs Assessment

DCPS has substantively undertaken steps outlined in this bill to determine the technology needs at each school, including an annual asset inventory and infrastructure upgrades. As noted above, DCPS implemented an asset inventory strategy during SY2018-19 and schools are required to maintain an accurate inventory of technology assets. As of spring 2021, DCPS completed our annual audit of technology assets across all schools to support annual resource planning for technology. The audit includes a physical inventory of every device in every school and an inventory of devices distributed to students and staff at home. As a result of these standardized expectations and routines, every school has confirmed their inventory and device needs, and we have provided support and additional devices where needed.

Every year, DCPS also works with OCTO to assess the state of schools' network infrastructure and modernizes equipment as needed. The annual infrastructure upgrade plan is developed by taking into consideration the age of equipment, network capacity, demand trends, and reported issues. As noted above, in FY22, we are investing an additional \$2.45 million to upgrade several schools' infrastructure to ensure they continue to offer reliable internet connectivity with the infusion of new devices in mind. DCPS also assessed and completed internet bandwidth upgrades in our largest schools prior to SY21-22. DCPS works closely with OCTO each year to assess our technology needs, develop a master agreement outlining the scope of technology services, and collaborates throughout the year to allocate resources to provide technology support to schools.

Digital Literacy

DCPS recognizes that digital equity is about more than devices and infrastructure, and we are intensely focused on ensuring digital literacy for all of our students. As part of ELi, K-12 students experience explicit instruction in digital citizenship. Students learn to use technology as a tool for content creation, data analysis, and critical thinking. Further, we continue refining our digitized curriculum, annually, equipping our education technology coaches with professional development so that they can effectively equip our teachers with the expertise needed to integrate technology into the curriculum.

DCPS believes that digital equity is a key lever to ensuring equity and excellence for every student. DCPS is committed to ensuring students across the entire District have access to the resources they need to be successful in the classroom and prepare for college and career. As we come to the end of our current three-year ELi plan, we are committed to engaging with stakeholders and publishing an updated comprehensive plan as part of our Capital Commitment that is aligned to the timeline outlined in this Act. However, given the multiple avenues in place for stakeholder input which I have outlined, we respectfully request the ability to leverage these current avenues rather than create an additional committee or process, which would be redundant. In sum, we agree with Council's commitment to updating our technology plan within the timeframe outlined but request the flexibility to develop the plan in a way which best aligns to engagement work already underway. I'm happy to answer any questions you have at this time.