

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



Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Oversight Hearing

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

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman

June 8, 2021
Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor for DC Public Schools (DCPS), and I am honored to testify before you today on our budget plans for Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22). I want to begin with an appreciation for Mayor Bowser's leadership during the unprecedented public health emergency and thank councilmembers for their unwavering commitment to supporting DC students in a year like no other. Thanks to the vision of the Mayor and the Council's support, the FY22 Budget and Financial Plan for DCPS demonstrates a commitment to ensure our public schools not only recover from this pandemic, but reopen stronger than before.

Today, I will focus my time on sharing our foundational approach to leverage strong local and federal investments. DCPS is planning for a full-time, five days a week return to in-person learning for all DCPS students this fall. We are thrilled that our students will return to their school buildings for full course loads and extracurricular activities in a safe and nurturing environment for the 2021-2022 school year beginning in August.

As we prepare for this summer and next school year, I want to recognize the significant investment of time and feedback we received from the community. Each school has a Recovery Community Corps (RCC) and Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) made up of parents, teachers, school staff, community members, and students. I am grateful for the time and dedication from our entire community in helping inform school-level planning with an eye toward equity.

Budget for Fiscal Year 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racial injustice has impacted students, families, and staff in a myriad of ways. We know that opportunity gaps were exacerbated during the public health emergency. That is why, as we develop school budgets and initiate district-wide investments for the next school year and beyond, our investments are directly aligned to our collective commitment to build back stronger.

DCPS is committed to a strong foundation for our road to recovery, even as student enrollment – a primary driver of school funding – decreased this school year. Mayor Bowser's FY22 budget includes a 3.6% increase to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), which will allow DCPS to maintain robust academic and extracurricular programming. Despite projected local revenue decreases for the District, the FY22 budget includes a \$1 billion local investment for schools, a \$23 million increase from FY21.

In addition to our operating budget, we are proud to continue our investment in our facilities through our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Our FY22-27 CIP includes more than \$1.5 billion towards our modernization projects, additions to help solve for overcrowding, and small capital construction projects. In alignment with the PACE Act, we have added seven new modernization projects to the budget, and we are continuing our commitment to consistency in our budgeting process with no projects being pushed back or removed from the budget. We have accelerated the Truesdell and Whitter projects in Ward 4 by one year and we have accelerated King Elementary School in Ward 8 and Drew Elementary School in Ward 7 by two years.

Additionally, we are leveraging federal funding for academic acceleration and enhanced social-emotional supports. As I testified on May 28, our DCPS students are incredibly resilient. With



that said, we know we need to provide more opportunities for funding for trauma-informed mental health supports, small group and individualized instruction, and engaging, joyful learning.

DCPS is strategically investing \$20 million in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding that the District received as part of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to ensure that no DCPS school will experience a reduction in their FY22 budget. As a result, DCPS will have over 200 more school-based employees next year, including 25 more school mental health professionals, and 50 more teachers!

To ensure that students and families are ready to return to in-person learning this fall, DCPS is strategically investing federal relief funding to expand our summer school offerings to include learning supports for every grade, including Pre-K, with a combination of in-person and virtual programs for up to 19,000 students. In the first few weeks of registration, 5,000 DCPS students already signed up to attend.

We are also in the midst of robust engagement and planning on the infusion of additional ESSER funds this spring. Trends from this engagement highlighted needs to invest in three significant areas for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond that align with our DCPS values:

- (1) Students First: Our first area of investment is ensuring our students have what they need to thrive academically and social-emotionally.
- (2) Excellence: Our second significant investment area is in our educators, allocating time to train and prepare for students' needs through the science of learning in light of the COVID-19 learning slide.
- (3) Equity: Finally, DCPS is committed to ensuring our policies, infrastructure, and technology systems continue to remove barriers to student success, especially for students of color and students furthest from opportunity.

Thriving Students

DCPS is investing \$33 million in federal funds for student learning acceleration and social emotional supports. Most funds will be allocated directly to schools based on their enrollment and population of students identified as at-risk. Each school is taking a grassroots engagement approach with their teachers, staff, families, and community to develop a tailored learning recovery plan for summer and beyond. For instance, at Phelps there will be a Summer Coding Camp and entrepreneurial opportunities. The 2021 Camp at Truesdell will provide enrichment and tutoring, and Payne is planning for a four-week academic experience with weekly field trips.

At the district-level, DCPS parents shared their priorities in our district-wide American Recovery Plan Engagement Survey issued within the past month. Resoundingly, families shared that our common goal is to ensure access to full-time, five days per week school for all students, which needs to include access to small group acceleration instruction and social-emotional supports for students. Our recovery approach is rooted in a commitment to serving the whole child, which includes relationship-building, student wellness, cognitively rich activity, and an intentional approach to instruction focusing on the skills each student needs to be successful.



Educator Excellence

During the COVID-19 health crisis, teachers have seen first-hand how their students have grown and they have also seen the areas where they need more support. As a result, our FY22 budget also includes additional investments specifically designed to support to our educators. This includes \$5 million for teachers to provide specialized, comprehensive training to prepare them to be human development experts to build student resiliency. We were also awarded \$10 million through a federal grant to support our new Rigorous Instruction Supports Equity (RISE) initiative, which aims to provide additional recruitment of talented educators, equity-centered professional development, support for new teachers, and performance-based compensation awards to our highest-need schools.

Most critically, this summer we will ensure our educators are equipped to address learning slide by providing a myriad of professional learning opportunities focused on accelerating learning. These professional development institutes will be centered around the following:

- Creating anti-racist, whole-child centered schools and classrooms that provide rigorous, culturally responsive, and inclusive instruction in a trauma-responsive and nurturing context, and
- Implementing a multi-tiered system of supports to increase the capacity of school teams to address foundation gaps in core instruction and strategically deploy teacher and student intervention and support to accelerate learning and eliminate racial gaps in student outcomes.

In other words, we are ensuring our educators are equipped to meet our students where they are and get them to where they need to be in order to reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment.

Technology Investments

Lastly, when we think about closing the access and opportunity gap, it is crucial to look toward the future with continued and enhanced technology investments. This year, DCPS is boldly investing \$38 million in student and educator technology to advance our Empowered Learners Initiative so that we can bridge the digital divide. This robust investment ensures that we can maintain a 1:1 student-to-device ratio in grades 3-12, and a 3:1 ratio in grades PK-2.

This investment will also ensure every teacher has an updated, dedicated device and provide enhanced technology support, upgraded software licenses, and meaningful training.

Conclusion

As a result of the vision and commitment from Mayor Bowser and from federal ESSER funds, DCPS is presented with the unique opportunity to rethink what is possible with public education. Our school leaders, teachers, and students are ready to step up to the challenge as our students return to full in-person learning this fall. These investments make clear the District's firm commitment to provide rigorous and joyful learning to all DCPS students every day.

I am grateful for the perseverance and collaboration from the entire DCPS community as we have worked through the ever-changing landscape of this pandemic. I look forward to continued



partnership with the DC Council to achieve our shared goal that every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.

