

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)



Public Hearing on DC Public Schools Budgeting Practices

Testimony of

Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.

Chancellor

DC Public Schools

Before the

Committee of the Whole

Chairman Phil Mendelson

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

November 14, 2023



Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of DC Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about DCPS' budgeting practices.

At DCPS, we are committed to supporting student learning and recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to Mayor Bowser's leadership, DCPS has robust resources to achieve this goal. Through the most recent budget, DCPS has been able to (1) invest in our educators, (2) use Federal funds to support recovery for students furthest from opportunity, (3) provide technology to students, and (4) grow a new high school.

First, investing in our educators. We know that the important work of educating students cannot happen without our outstanding educators. That is why we were pleased to come to an agreement with the Washington Teacher's Union earlier this year to increase compensation for over 5,500 DCPS educators. This investment of \$346 million between Fiscal Year 2023 and 2026 delivered robust backpay in recognition of the tireless efforts and sacrifice our teachers have made over the past three years. With a 12.5 percent increase in salary over four years and a four percent retention bonus, the agreement provided our educators with nationally competitive raises that will help DCPS to retain and attract the best talent for our schools. We are currently engaged in negotiations with the Washington Teacher's Union on a new contract and look forward to coming to an agreement.

As part of our ongoing commitment to student success and equity, DCPS provides bonus payments to Highly Effective educators through the IMPACT evaluation system. DCPS paid \$21.3 million in IMPACTplus bonuses for SY 2021 – 2022. DCPS designates teachers Highly Effective when they demonstrate best practices, meet benchmarks for student growth, and achieve the rigorous goals they and their school leaders set. Teachers rated Highly Effective who return to DCPS the subsequent year can earn up to \$25,000 in additional compensation annually. We know that students furthest from opportunity need more resources. That is why we provide higher pay to highly effective teachers in Title I schools. As a result, teachers in Title I schools earn, on average, over \$4,000 more annually than teachers in non-Title I schools.

Second, using federal funds. DCPS is committed to using Federal ESSER funding to support student learning and recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During School Year 22-23, DCPS provided high-impact tutoring services to approximately 7,000 students. These students received 1:1 or small group instruction for at least 90 minutes per week. DCPS will continue these efforts during this school year and refine partnerships and practices to deliver high-quality high-impact tutoring.



This Fiscal Year, the final year of ESSER availability, DCPS will use a portion of ESSER funding to continue implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that includes academic and social emotional learning strategies designed to accelerate student learning during the school year and summer. At DCPS, educators work together with the support of Central Services staff to critically analyze broader schoolwide systems, structures, and practices that can contribute to inequitable student outcomes. Together, DCPS staff propel the achievement of students who face the greatest disparities in opportunities by screening students for needs throughout the year, designing interventions to meet those needs, and rigorously monitoring progress. DCPS Central Services support this work by providing coaching, data analysis, and ensuring fidelity across schools. Through our Panorama Student Success data system, we can analyze student outcomes and ensure that students receive the necessary support, even if they change schools. Because this is the final year where ESSER funding will be available, DCPS will be making critical decisions during the budget development process about which ESSER investments to maintain with local funding.

Third, providing technology to students. In alignment with our greater vision to make sure that every child feels loved, challenged, and prepared, it is DCPS' goal to ensure that all students have the digital resources necessary to succeed. With that goal in mind, DCPS will continue to maintain the original student-to-device ratios outlined in our Empowered Learners Initiative. For PK – 2nd grade students, student-to-device ratios will remain 3:1 and for 3rd – 12th grade students, the ratio will be 1:1.

DCPS is currently adjusting and updating its next Technology Plan for 2024 – 2027 as required by District law. As with all such plans, future budget estimates are preliminary pending annual funding allocations. We will work closely with our Technology Advisory Committee, a diverse group of DCPS representatives across schools and wards, to provide ongoing input and feedback in the development of equitable agency standards for technology in the classroom.

Moving forward, DCPS' goal is to replace student devices every four years and will strive to establish a sustainable and uniform refresh cycle by replacing approximately one-fourth of DCPS devices each Fiscal Year, budget pending. To ensure that all students have the devices they need, DCPS will continue to invest in state-of-the-art devices that can be maintained for four years and work closely with OCTO to ensure that each device is secure and re-imaged annually.

Fourth, growing a new high school. Thanks to Mayor Bowser's leadership, DCPS was able to open a new high school on MacArthur Boulevard this fall to alleviate overcrowding at nearby schools. Through a robust community engagement process, DCPS worked with over 2,000



stakeholders to ensure we created a space fit for rigorous academics and a well-rounded educational experience. With that said, we have done incredible work at the MacArthur facility and remain excited about its additional construction phases.

The completion of Phase One in August 2023 saw DCPS deliver a facility ready for our inaugural 9th and 10th grade classes. We renovated interior spaces, including the gym and cafeteria, and ensured our learning spaces are equipped for students and teachers. In addition, we are proud to offer six different art classes, two world languages, three Career and Technical Education options, and 11 athletic programs during our first year. In Phase Two of the project, we will continue to expand the number of classrooms and student-centered spaces in the building. DCPS will outfit all classrooms with brand-new furniture and state-of-the-art technology, including new Smartboards.

Finally, DCPS budgeting practices are sound, refined, and incorporate significant community feedback.

While funding availability will ebb and flow and reprogramming timelines do limit our ability to use funds, we continue to target our efforts and achieve results while complying with policies that support important internal local controls. In Fiscal Year 2023, DCPS pivoted in response to Council budget adjustments. It is a testament to our budgeting processes that we were able to maintain core commitments and operations to a great extent. For example, we are currently processing IMPACT bonuses for School Year 2022 – 2023 and recently submitted a reprogramming request to OSSE to use ESSER funds to pay out the full awards to all staff. We are committed to working collaboratively with other agencies to process payments as quickly as possible.

Each year, DCPS begins a robust budget development process in the fall. As one part of this process, DCPS's Office of Fiscal Strategy, our School Planning division, and our Office of Engagement and Partnerships all collaborate closely with principals and Local School Advisory Teams to develop school budgets. DCPS engages students and families in budget creation through LSAT meetings, webinars, student budget roundtables, newsletters, formal communications with school communities, and Council hearings. Tonight, DCPS will host its annual public budget hearing at 6:00 PM. This virtual meeting will allow DCPS stakeholders to share their priorities for DCPS' budget directly with me for consideration. We look forward to hearing from the community on this important topic.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and discuss important budgeting practices.

