

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



Joint Public Hearing
on
Bill 23-488, the “Student Activity Fund Theatrical and Music Performance
Expenditures Act of 2019,”
Bill 23-569, the “District of Columbia Public Schools Family and School
Community Fundraising Equity Act of 2019”,
and,
Bill 23-365, the “Critical Risk Rate School Funding Designation Act of 2019”

Testimony of
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Before the
Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman and
Committee on Education
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairperson

March 10, 2020
Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004



Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, members of the Committee on Education, Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Dr. Amy Maisterra, Deputy Chancellor of Innovation and Systems Improvement for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on B23-0448, the “Student Activity Fund Theatrical and Music Performance Expenditures Act of 2019” and B23-569, the “District of Columbia Public Schools Family and School Community Fundraising Equity Act of 2019.” As you know, Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn has provided written testimony regarding B23-365, the “Critical Risk Rate School Funding Designation Act of 2019.”

I would like to take a moment to share more about DCPS’ role for both school-level budgets and in supporting partnerships with students and families. As an agency, DCPS’ role is to promote equity, set a clear standard for excellence, and support schools in meeting those expectations. Based on this approach, DCPS allocates funding to schools through the Comprehensive Staffing Model and provides supports and services through our central office. The DCPS budget is modeled on our collective vision to accelerate progress for all students. This year, we released an updated [Family and Community Budget Guide](#), which aims to make the budget process more transparent. We also released a new interactive budget data center and pocket guide to help families and community members understand the DCPS budget process.

As a part of our approach, DCPS also works with schools to develop and promote strong partnerships with students, families, and other community groups. We recognize that our greatest asset is our collective vision and ability to work collaboratively and authentically with DCPS families and other stakeholders. It is our strategic priority to engage families by ensuring quality communication and deepening partnerships with families and the community. We take parent engagement very seriously and we actively foster engagement with families. I am proud to share that in addition to having a dedicated family and community engagement team at central office, we have set high expectations for the establishment of Local School Advisory Teams to advise on school budget development annually. In addition, DCPS completed more home visits than any other school district in the country last year — more than 11,000 in total.

It is important to note that schools may access additional funding sources and revenue streams outside of the DCPS budget. Two such sources of revenue are the topic of today’s hearing. The first are groups organized by DCPS parents which function as non-profit organizations, commonly referred to as ‘parent organizations.’ They allow parents to receive funds and make donations to their children’s schools through DC Government’s donation process, which is facilitated by *ServeDC* to ensure legal compliance with DC Government’s donation requirements. DCPS works with parents and community members involved in parent organizations throughout the city and, based on community feedback, we provide guidance around starting and promoting parent organizations. We prioritize our efforts for school communities that may have obstacles to parent engagement or do not have an existing parent organization. As an example, we recently supported the Excel Academy community with the creation of a parent organization.



The second authorized source of revenue is a Student Activity Fund (SAF). Student Activity Funds are separate from a school's operating budget and must be supplemental in nature. They are intended to finance recognized extra-curricular activities of DCPS student bodies. These accounts are activated by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), which require monthly reporting and adherence to a set of internal controls.

DCPS provides guidance and supports compliance related to school administration of Student Activity Funds, but DCPS does not oversee these expenditures in the same way as with larger funding sources. This past year, DCPS strengthened our partnership with OCFO to provide enhanced training and clear guidance on the appropriate administration of Student Activity Fund accounts. These include the following:

- DCPS collaborated with OCFO to provide mandatory training during the bi-annual two-day professional development training series on required policies and procedures, expected internal controls, and allowable and unallowable expenditures;
- DCPS shared SAF requirements and compliance reminders through our first annual *Fiscal Foundations Webinar*, which was hosted this fall for school leaders and finance designees;
- Principals also received guidance from the OCFO's annual issuance of a Student Activity Fund Policy Manual;
- Finally, DCPS hosts monthly business calls with schools to address questions or concerns on fiscal management practices. These monthly calls provide regular opportunities to ensure compliance with Student Activity Fund policies.

We are committed to continuing to support our schools, in partnership with OCFO, to ensure requirements related to this small but important part of a school's funding are met.

With this context in mind, I would now like to share feedback on the proposed bills.

Bill 23-488, the "Student Activity Fund Theatrical and Music Performance Expenditures Act of 2019"

Regarding B23-488, the "Student Activity Fund Theatrical and Music Performance Expenditures Act of 2019," DCPS does not have any concerns with allowing schools to use student activity funds on stipends, as detailed in the legislation. We do believe that our school leaders, in conjunction with their Instructional Superintendent and in alignment with programmatic goals, should have the ability to make strategic investments that benefit their student community holistically.

The goal of these funds is to promote extracurricular activities for the student body, and we will continue to work to ensure they are appropriately dedicated to the benefit of all students.

Bill 23-569, the "District of Columbia Public Schools Family and School Community Fundraising Equity Act of 2019"



I would like to now shift focus and share feedback on B23-569, the “District of Columbia Public Schools Family and School Community Fundraising Equity Act of 2019.” First, as I noted prior, parent organizations are independent 501(c)3 organizations. Therefore, DCPS does not have direct oversight over their operations.

We believe that the intent of this bill to promote equity of access to resources is ambitious and admirable. At the same time, we do have concerns about its overall effect on parent engagement and potential challenges with implementation.

First, we believe that operationalizing this bill would be complex. We have concerns about how a redistribution of funds could be effectuated for external organizations where we have limited oversight or authority. Second, the Act could result in hindering the creation, activity, and engagement of parent organizations. Last, we would not support the limitation of spending on instructional positions as we believe that school communities should have the autonomy to dedicate donated funds to where there is the most need.

I do want to again share that the goals of this bill align with our own goals for schools around equitable resourcing. If the bill moves forward, we may be able to partner around legislation that allows parent organizations to opt-in to this type of structure. Ultimately, we do believe more information and time is needed to study the best path forward, and we are happy to continue to engage around these efforts.

Designing a Next Generation Budget Model for FY22 and Beyond

As we look ahead to Fiscal Year 2022 and beyond, DCPS has taken a step back to holistically evaluate our budget model to determine how we can best engage in transparent, equitable, and financially sustainable budgeting. We are committed to empowering principals to use resources in a flexible way to improve student outcomes, engage with our stakeholders and school budget experts, and ensure that our budgets meet the needs of our students and families. Student Activity Funds and donations from parent organizations are one piece of the investments that go to our schools. Currently, our focus is on improving the budgeting process as it relates to our school funding model. We appreciate your partnership and the support of Mayor Bowser as we move forward with developing a budget model centered on equity, financial sustainability, and transparency.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today and share DCPS’ position on these bills. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

