

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**District of Columbia Public Schools**



Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of  
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Interim Chancellor  
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the  
Committee on Education  
The Honorable David Grosso, Chairman  
Council of the District of Columbia

Thursday, April 19<sup>th</sup>  
10:00 AM  
Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good morning, Councilmember Grosso, members of the Committee, and Committee staff. I am Amanda Alexander, D.C. Public Schools' Interim Chancellor. I am honored to testify before you today.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2019 Budget, "A Fair Shot," is the District's 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive balanced budget. This budget does more to make Washington, DC a place where people of all backgrounds and in all stages of life are able to live and thrive by making key investments in infrastructure, education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, seniors, and public safety. These investments reflect the key priorities identified by District residents at Budget Engagement Forums and telephone town halls held during the budget formulation process. They also reflect the needs of our students and communities, with an increase of \$94 million for schools and a 3.91 percent increase in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF). I want to thank Mayor Bowser for her strong support of DC Public Schools, as demonstrated through this budget.

DC Public Schools (DCPS) has faced significant challenges over the past six months. I am eager to work with you, our city's leaders, and valued partners, as well as with families, educators, and students, to restore public trust and continue DCPS' path of progress. I also recognize that trust must be earned.

An important part of building trust is authentic community engagement. In presenting this budget, I am deeply cognizant that it represents the hopes, needs, and input of thousands of DCPS stakeholders.

In developing the DCPS FY19 budget, we:

- Hosted five citywide budget engagement sessions in December, January, and February to gather feedback on spending priorities;
- Led webinars for Local School Advisory Teams (or LSAT) in January and February, so that members were aware of the process and nuances of setting their local budget budgets; and
- Offered hands-on support for principals in developing their school budgets.

This budget is stronger because it reflects the priorities of DCPS students, families, educators, and partners.

I am excited to share some of the highlights of the DCPS FY19 Budget.

First, I want to state clearly that every DCPS school will at least maintain their current funding amount next year, in FY19, including 20 schools that might have experienced cuts due to decreases in enrollment, through \$4.4 million in "Targeted Stabilization" funding.

The budget also includes funding for the new teachers' contract that Mayor Bowser and DCPS signed with our teachers union. Nationally, teachers are walking out of the classroom to demand fair pay and needed resources. That is not the case at DCPS: Our teachers have the highest starting salary in the country, the ability to earn six-figure salaries, and now, raises for



the entire workforce. We know that our work starts with our people. We are leading the nation in attracting, compensating, and retaining great talent.

With at-risk funding, DCPS works to support all students, especially students furthest from opportunity. At-risk funding is one way we further that mission by investing at-risk money in two ways:

- To support targeted initiatives and programming for at-risk student populations at high-need schools; and
- To give school leaders unrestricted funds that they can use to create unique programs specific to their school community.

In DCPS schools, this funding goes to things like extended year, career academies, and literacy partners. The FY19 budget includes \$53 million in at-risk funds.

The Mayor is also investing in school facilities across the District. This budget contains an unprecedented investment of more than \$1.3 billion to modernize and update our school buildings because students deserve to learn in world-class environments. This budget ensures that no school construction project was delayed and all projects are funded for a full modernization.

I have worked in our schools for the last 20 years and know that the quality of the building contributes to the quality of children's learning experiences. This includes investing in facilities that meet the learning needs of students, from the pre-K classroom designed for our youngest learners opening at Bruce Monroe ES this fall, to the science classroom at Coolidge HS, which will open in Fall 2019.

There are several additional facilities investments in the FY19 budget, including:

- In Ward 8, Boone Elementary School, formerly Orr Elementary, received an additional \$2 million to finalize modernization work;
- In Ward 2, Hyde-Addison ES received additional funding to expand the size of classrooms in the Addison building; and
- In Ward 6, Maury ES received additional support to ensure their modernization is fully funded.

Next, DCPS is excited to grow the Reign: Empowering Young Women as Leaders initiative, which aims to empower young women of color. This fall, Excel Academy will become DCPS' first all-girls public school, offering rigorous and joyful learning experiences to pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Excel Academy will be the first DCPS citywide school in Ward 8. We are working closely with the Excel staff and the parent community to ensure a smooth transition.

We are also excited to continue our investments in Reign and Empowering Males of Color programming in FY19:

- DCPS is investing half a million dollars in Innovation Grants will support school-level initiatives that nurture the strengths, address challenges, and improve outcomes for students of color; and



- DCPS is proud to continue the “We the Girls” Leadership Series and Conference, which provides a safe space for our young women of color in middle schools to sharpen their leadership skills and build community.

Lastly, in response to enrollment trends and school planning engagement, DCPS will add new pre-K classes and grades for communities that need them.

- There will be five new pre-K classrooms at Amidon-Bowen ES, Noyes ES, Miner ES, Takoma EC, and Thomson ES; and
- Five of our schools are adding grades, including Ron Brown College Preparatory HS, Van Ness ES, Houston ES Dual-Language, Roosevelt HS Dual-Language, and MacFarland MS.

I am proud to have built my career as an educator in DCPS. As you know, I joined this school district in 1998 as a kindergarten teacher at Walker-Jones Elementary School, and later served as principal at Bunker Hill Elementary School and Ross Elementary School. Most recently, I served as Chief of the Office of Elementary Schools, leading DCPS’ elementary school support and early childhood programs.

Each of our 115 schools serves a vital role in their community. As DCPS’ Interim Chancellor, I seek to provide those schools with excellent curriculum, valuable professional development and supports, and targeted investments that drive outcomes for students.

During my time as an educator, I’ve developed and practiced a core set of beliefs around what a great school system should look like. First, I believe in the value of data, both the kind you can quickly scan on a spreadsheet and the type you see and hear when you walk the hallways of a school.

Next, I believe in tiered supports. We must meet every one of our students where they are and provide the appropriate supports to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to achieve greatness.

Finally, I believe in the power of people in our schools to change lives, because I have seen it happen again and again. School leaders working with their Academic Leadership Team (or ALT) and their Local School Advisory Team (or LSAT) is crucial to improving students’ lives.

What I have learned in my first two months as Interim Chancellor is that much of what the district needs now is not that different from the things I helped schools implement in the past: a relentless focus on data and transparency, an aligned response to interventions, and an unshakable belief in the importance of what we are doing. I am committed to providing stable and ambitious leadership during this time of transition.

Any conversation about spending and investment is fundamentally about looking to the future. My priorities for the next six months include finishing SY2017-2018 strong, setting our schools and students up for success in SY2018-19, and continuing our work to ensure that DCPS’ attendance and graduation policies are robust and effective.



Today, DCPS knows more than we did several months ago. We dug deep into our systems, practices, and culture and we discovered places that urgently required intervention and improvement, especially with regard to attendance and graduation. We are working to repair those broken systems quickly and thoughtfully, in partnership with stakeholders.

We recognize that too many of our young people are not coming to school every day and on time. In DC, almost one in four students is chronically absent. We are moving fast to make several critical shifts to focus on prevention, working to ensure that students are engaged at school and improving communication with families around attendance data and expectations. These efforts include new attendance notification systems and text messages, constant progress monitoring, and robust school-based supports.

Simultaneously, DCPS is rebuilding foundational secondary systems and accelerating student supports to ensure DC's vision for high school is implemented with excellence. Graduation is our top priority for Spring 2018 and the 2018-19 school year. In FY19, DCPS will continue to invest in student support initiatives and streamline our approach to planning around graduation.

This month, we plan on releasing a graduation data update on where the 2018 cohort is in terms of graduation. We know that there is more work to do to make sure these students are college or career ready and we will continue to make our progress toward that goal accessible and transparent.

At a recent school visit at Ballou HS, I met a student named Dimilah Jones. As I've shared with you, she had previously emailed me to let me know that she hopes to one day become Chancellor. At Ballou, she spoke to me about what she values in her school and the way she sees Ballou supporting her and her friends. She understood the attendance and graduation problem and we talked through the challenges keeping many of her classmates from being on track. She had ideas to share and carefully laid out the supports she and her classmates might need.

In that conversation, Dimilah demonstrated something I feel strongly—our students are experts in their own education. They know exactly where they need support, and they are asking for it. At DCPS, we are working to ensure we listen and act.

I am confident that the Mayor's investments in DCPS will play a critical role in supporting students and families. The Council and this Committee are valuable allies in this effort. I am eager to continue working together to achieve our shared vision and give all residents a fair shot to benefit from Washington, DC's continued prosperity.

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

