

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



Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Oversight Hearing

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

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Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Grosso, 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 plans for Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21). I also want to highlight my appreciation for Mayor Bowser's leadership during this unprecedented public health emergency. Through the proposed FY21 Budget and Financial Plan, the Mayor has demonstrated that DC's public schools continue to be a top priority.

With the transition to learning at home, we saw DCPS schools adapt to new daily routines, new classroom settings, and new ways to deliver instruction. I am proud that we showed the District, nation, and world what DCPS is capable of when we partner with students, schools, families, and the greater community. I want to take the opportunity to share some of the ways DCPS has ensured students and families have the supports needed to learn and thrive while our school buildings are closed:

- Our online learning hub received nearly half a million page views from 51 states and over 130 countries. We also distributed learning at home packets, comprised of more than 3.5 million printed pages, so that all students have access to learning materials.
- We recognized early on that access to technology was a critical need for our students to continue their education. To remove barriers to learning, DCPS distributed approximately 10,000 devices and 4,000 hotspots.
- DCPS' Food and Nutrition team made it possible to serve more than 580,000 meals to students and families. In addition to distributing meals to students across the district, ten of our school meal sites, with support from Martha's Table and DC Central Kitchen, are providing groceries to families in need.

I want to recognize the ways that our families and communities came together in this critical moment. I would like to thank all the teachers, staff, and community members who worked together to make sure that our students were engaged, supported, safe, and prepared to end the school year strong.

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget

As we look to next school year, Mayor Bowser's FY21 budget includes a 3% increase to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), which will allow DCPS to continue to accelerate the supports we provide for our students and families. Despite projected revenue decreases for the District, the FY21 budget includes a \$982M local investment for schools, a \$79M increase from FY20. Historic investments in our schools will allow us to continue preparing every student for college, career, and life. Through these investments, DCPS school budgets will remain secure. This includes a new support of \$3.4 million in the Chancellor's Initial Budget Assistance funds for a subset of schools to support their ongoing school improvement effort; as well as \$6.1 million in budget assistance, based on requests from school leaders and Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs).

I also want to highlight the steps we have taken to improve budget transparency. This year, DCPS provided more information regarding each school's budget allocation to better inform school communities about any key enrollment, student demographic, or programmatic shifts that affect a specific school's allocation. We also released a DCPS Pocket Budget Guide, which



shares more details on the FY21 Budget planning process. I am fully committed to ensuring that DCPS' budget is transparent for our communities.

DCPS believes providing enriching and nurturing supports for the mind, body, and family are more important than ever. To accelerate outcomes for our students furthest from opportunity, DCPS launched the Connected Schools Model in School Year 2019-2020. Through a sustained \$2.1 million investment in FY21, we are able to provide wraparound services to transform schools into spaces that support students' academic development, and a family's overall wellbeing through access to resources related to health, employment, housing, childcare, and more.

To continue increasing equity in technology access, especially in the current environment of learning at home, the FY21 budget will advance our Empowered Learners Initiative with a \$6.9 million investment to close the digital divide and help reach a 1:1 student-to-device ratio by 2022.

I remain focused on providing opportunities that prepare every student, in every grade level for post-secondary success. For our youngest learners, we will be expanding Early Childhood Development Centers at 17 schools, which will allow DCPS to offer more infant and toddler seats across the district. Through a \$450,000 investment in proven early literacy intervention programs, we will serve an additional 600 students across the city to help reach our goal of every K-2 student reading at grade level by 2022. For DCPS graduates, we are excited to introduce DCPS Persists with the support of the A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation. This innovative program will provide students in the Class of 2020 and beyond with a guaranteed support network as they embark on the next chapter of their educational journey. Our students should not have to navigate college alone, and I am excited about the phenomenal suite of supports we are offering and the opportunities this program will help our students pursue.

A Great School in Every Neighborhood

While continuing to offer strong programming through our operating budget, DCPS is consistently focused on creating a safe, affirming, and empowering space for student learning through the District's Capital budget. We strive to provide excellent schools and modern facilities that promote and support successful teaching and learning, reflect the pride and traditions of DCPS, and serve as pillars of our communities.

The FY21-FY26 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) builds on our commitment to provide world-class facilities and a great school in every neighborhood. Over the next six years, we anticipate more than \$1.4 billion in capital funds, including \$1.27 billion for more than 40 school modernization projects. These investments include:

- The construction of a new elementary school building at the Old Hardy site on Foxhall Road to address overcrowding in the Wilson feeder pattern;
- A permanent home for Bard High School Early College with a new facility at the former Malcolm X Opportunity Center site in Ward 8, which will be opening in 2023;
- A permanent home for Excel Academy; and,
- Small capital improvements at schools across all eight wards such as outdoor field replacements and new HVAC systems.



Conclusion

The District is presented with the unique opportunity to rebuild and reimagine systems to be more equitable, resilient and vibrant than before. I know the DCPS team is well-equipped to support and provide for District residents and will continue to be as a result of the investments in Mayor Bowser's proposed budget. With the support of the Mayor, DCPS' FY21 budget expands student supports, and promotes access to high-quality learning to ensure that our young people are able to thrive in life. These investments make clear the district's firm commitment to students and reaffirm the values that the DCPS family strives to lead with every day—Students First, Equity, Excellence, Teamwork, Courage, and Joy.

I am grateful for the DCPS community's resilience as we work through the dynamic nature of this pandemic. Only by working together can we maintain and grow a culture of excellence that provides an equitable education for all our students. I look forward to continued partnership with the D.C. 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.

