

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



Fiscal Year 2019-Fiscal Year 2020
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools

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

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Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, members of the Council, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today and discuss DC Public Schools' progress and our strategic direction going forward. I would like to start by thanking Mayor Bowser for her continued support of DCPS. I am also honored today to discuss the progress DCPS has made to prepare all students from Pre-K to 12th grade with a high-quality education.

During my first year as Chancellor of DC Public Schools, I have had the opportunity to engage with students, educators, families, and community members and have used their perspectives to inform our path forward. I met with members of our community at Ferebee Friday events in all eight wards. I went on neighborhood tours directed by students, so that I could see the city through their eyes. I held focus groups at every DCPS high school, so that I could hear directly from students about their post-secondary plans and how we as a district can help them achieve those goals. Informed by this engagement and accelerate progress toward our Capital Commitment goals, DCPS is focused on three priorities: ensuring great schools in every neighborhood and at every grade level, preparing every student for post-secondary success, and promoting equity and transparency in our work.

DCPS works to ensure there is a **great school in every neighborhood at every grade level**. After a decade of progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), DCPS continues to be the fastest improving urban school district in three of the four categories. For the fourth consecutive year, DCPS students made gains on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), showing that our students are more prepared to take on the challenges of post-secondary life. Across all eight wards, 67 DCPS schools received a 3 STAR Rating or higher on the DC School Report Card, and 34 schools received a higher STAR Rating compared to the 2017-2018 School Year.

We know that great educators are the key to our success, so we continue to invest in our DCPS team through strong starting salaries, professional development, and support. This led us to retaining 93 percent of effective and highly effective teachers and 95 percent of effective and highly effective principals. As a result of the strong programming we offer across the district, we are proud to now enroll more than 50,000 students for the first time since 2006. Families are also key partners in our work. And last year, DCPS completed more home visits than any other school district in the country — more than 11,000 in total.

We know that we must measure our progress in how we are **preparing every student for post-secondary success**. Last year, we launched the DCPS Student Guide to Graduation, Career, and College, which gives every student in grades 9-12 a clear understanding of where they are on the path to graduation and how their interests are aligned to post-secondary opportunities. We continue to expand the number of career-focused NAF Academies that we offer, so students across the district can explore career pathways including health sciences, engineering, and culinary arts.

Over the past decade, we have seen AP scores rise for nine consecutive years, and the DCPS Class of 2018 had the highest college enrollment rate since 2010. We continue to expand dual-



enrollment opportunities, so students can earn credits and build skills in college courses before they cross the stage at high school graduation. DCPS established the Career Ready Internship program in 2015 to expose students to in-demand career paths, and since then, students have completed nearly 3,000 internships and earned over \$4 million in wages. We know that there is still more work to be done to help all students on the path to graduation and that building strong systems of support is a multi-year process. We will continue to prioritize this work, so that future DCPS graduates are prepared for college and career.

Across all areas, we are focused on keeping **equity and transparency** at the heart of our work. DCPS has worked hard to engage school leadership and LSAT members throughout the year to increase transparency around the budget process, as well as develop new public tools and resources to bring clarity in how school funds are allocated. How we allocate our resources is a representation of our priorities, and so for Fiscal Year 2022, DCPS will develop the next generation of our budget model with a focus on equity, financial sustainability, and transparency.

Transformation Strategies

At the same time as we celebrate our progress, we must also recognize that opportunity gaps persist and that more work is needed to ensure great schools in every neighborhood and at every grade level, prepare every student for post-secondary success, and promote equity and transparency. We know that we need to think differently about how we are serving our students, so we are introducing new strategies to support our students and our communities who have struggled persistently over time.

We launched the Cluster Support Model with specific focus on the schools that feed into Ballou and Anacostia High Schools. Through the Cluster Support Model, our central office content teams from technology, to special education services, to operations have reconfigured to align to Cluster Support Teams, so that every school receives integrated support and has a clear point of contact across each content area.

Across all our work, we are grounding our approach in research-based best practices by implementing professional development on the brain science around the impact of adverse childhood experiences on student development.

In order to transform outcomes for our students, we focused our attention on schools designated for Comprehensive Status through the Every Student Succeeds Act. We launched the Connected Schools Model at 10 schools across the district, and these schools are taking a whole-school, whole-community approach to ensure that every family knows they are a welcome and valued member of their school community.

After engagement with more than 1,700 stakeholders, Ballou HS and Anacostia HS have announced their Redesign models, which will include new partnerships, career pathways, and student supports.



- Ballou HS’s model will include real-world case studies, which will make learning relevant to future career experiences, and will establish a new Information Technology Engineering pathway at the school.
- Anacostia HS will implement a new project-based learning approach that makes connections across courses and allows students the opportunity to make connections across courses. DCPS will also establish a new Civil and Environmental Engineering pathway at the school.

We know that engaging and rigorous classroom experiences help turn learning activities into memories, so we are proud to incorporate Cornerstones lessons at all grade levels — including learning to ride a bike and documenting the district through the Our City Showcase. DCPS has launched 12 new sports over the past decade including archery, lacrosse, swimming, and basketball and bowling for students with disabilities, so that students across all age groups learn to value teamwork and persistence. When I visit classrooms from Pre-K through 12th grade, I see students who are empowered to take on challenges, engaged in thoughtfully planned lessons, and building skills that will serve them long beyond the classroom.

Looking Ahead

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Bowser, we continue to invest in our schools and our students in ways that are delivering outcomes for students. DCPS has invested over \$3 billion to create world-class spaces for teaching and learning, including more than 60 newly modernized school facilities since 2010. I have seen firsthand the ways that schools are using these new facilities to take teaching and learning to the next level.

Over the past decade, we have focused on serving young men and women of color through the launch of Ron Brown College Preparatory Academy and by adding Excel Academy to the DCPS family. I am proud that Ron Brown will graduate its first class of Young Kings this spring. Looking ahead, we will continue to grow our programs at Bard High School Early College DC, the Early College Academy at Coolidge High School, and the new Ida B. Wells Middle School.

Since 2009, DCPS' Pre-K enrollment has grown by 29 percent, and DCPS now enrolls more than 6,000 Pre-K students. This fall, we will launch the Stevens Early Learning Center, which will include a first of its kind lottery preference for students furthest from opportunity. Through this model, we will prioritize our youngest learners, so that they enter kindergarten ready to thrive. We will continue to focus on recruiting and retaining the best teachers through strong professional development opportunities, educator recognition through IMPACT bonuses and events like Standing Ovation, and opportunities for growth.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to share DCPS’ progress with you today. With the leadership of Mayor Bowser, and the support of the DC Council, I look forward to the ways that DCPS will continue to improve outcomes for all students, so that every student is prepared to thrive in college, career, and life. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

