

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



Fiscal Year 2020  
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of  
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Chancellor  
District of Columbia Public Schools

Before the  
Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

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Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast



Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today to discuss DCPS' efforts to maximize learning opportunities for all students while safely delivering on our commitment to reopen schools. And while our focus over the last year has centered on adapting our services to meet the demands of the pandemic, we plan to accelerate and reimagine supports for our students furthest from opportunity by placing recovery at the forefront of our work.

I would like to express my gratitude to our students, teachers, school leaders, and staff for their support in DCPS as we remained committed to putting students first and expanding the student experience with in-person and virtual learning. Under Mayor Bowser's leadership, DCPS continues to pioneer new ways to meet our goals for equity and excellence. Now more than ever, we remain committed to ensuring every school guarantees students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment. While the last year has changed the way we engage and support students in their learning, we continue to build on DCPS' strong foundation.

A DCPS education begins with our youngest learners, and we continue to prioritize quality early childhood education (ECE) experiences across the district. I am proud to share that we will continue to expand DCPS ECE seats: most recently with the new Stevens Early Learning Center and next year with the Early Learning Center on Military Road. For our older students, we continue to develop a strong pathway to career or college by providing Student Guides to Graduation, Career, and College. These individualized guides provide clear, personalized information around the steps needed to earn a diploma and pursue college or career opportunities aligned with a student's skills and interests. For our graduates, we have launched DCPS Persists with the Class of 2020: an innovative alumni program, which provides eligible students with a network of supports that ensures they have the guidance and resources they need to earn a degree and pursue a meaningful career.

### **Enhancements for the Learning at Home Experience**

We also continue to facilitate a love of learning and joyful experiences for all our students. In response to the pandemic, the needs of teaching and learning evolved rapidly, and I am proud to say the DCPS team continues to rise to the challenge. DCPS has leveraged Canvas as a critical interface for virtual learning. Last Spring, all students began learning at home with digital access to quality instructional materials aligned to the DCPS scope and sequence. By the start of school, DCPS mapped over 10,000 courses to their virtual equivalent on Canvas. We also provided professional development to over 6,000 instructional staff members that covered virtual topics, such as learning platforms, Microsoft Teams, and other virtual tools.

We are committed to continuous improvement within the virtual instructional space. For example, on February 25<sup>th</sup>, DCPS hosted a virtual learning conference for our instructional leaders. This included over 60 sessions devoted to concrete suggestions for increasing student engagement, maximizing technology tools for increased learning in specific content areas, providing quality feedback and coaching in the virtual space, and more. All of these sessions featured DCPS schools showcasing the best practices they have developed and giving practical tips about how they can be implemented in other schools.

### **A Safe Return to In-Person Learning**

Even with our commitment to facilitate quality learning at home, DCPS has remained grounded in the firm belief that a safe and healthy in-person learning opportunity is the best way to teach and reach students who are facing significant barriers to success with virtual learning. From the launch of Student Support Centers and opening of CARE classrooms to reopening all our schools in Term 3, we have continued to meet our goal to provide opportunities for students to return to school and receive the



critical supports they deserve. We know this is particularly important for our youngest learners as gaps in early literacy, social emotional development, and access to quality learning experiences have long-term impacts on student success.

We also know that with layered safety protections and protocols, like those now in place in our buildings, schools can safely reopen. Through Mayor Bower's leadership, DCPS has invested over \$33 million in safety measures for schools, including \$3.6 million for additional PPE, \$5.5 million to building readiness initiatives, and \$24 million to HVAC enhancements. All schools have received portable medical-grade True HEPA filters in their learning areas and approximately 5,000 were placed across DCPS schools. DCPS is proud to have been able to partner with DC Health and Children's National Hospital to make the Pfizer vaccine available to DCPS school-based employees, contractors, and OSSE transportation partners who were assigned to serve in-person at the start of Term 3 on a first-registered, first-served basis. Approximately 3,000 DCPS staff received doses of the COVID-19 vaccine during the recent vaccine clinics held at Dunbar High School. Additionally, Mayor Bowser announced that all teachers and staff who work in a school are able to receive the vaccine beginning this week.

Based on feedback from our stakeholders, including the DC Council, Term 3 reopening plans were shaped by engagement with each school's Reopen Community Corps. They reviewed feedback from elementary and secondary learning preference surveys, led with equity to prioritize their highest-need students, and helped school leaders design a tailored reopening plan for their school in Term 3. Every school now offers a range of in-person learning options and services for students including In-Person Learning Classrooms with teachers, CARE Classrooms or tutoring services with staff facilitators, and self-contained classrooms for special education students. As we look to the coming months, we will continue to promote in-person opportunities in line with all guidance from DC Health and the CDC.

### **Reaching Forward: Accelerating Student Learning**

As DCPS approaches the one-year mark of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we are faced with a choice: Recover by returning to the status quo, or recover by rebuilding and re-envisioning what is possible, together. We are choosing the latter, and this work has already started.

Our plan includes \$33 million in student learning acceleration and social emotional supports. Most funds will be allocated directly to schools based on their enrollment and population of students identified as at-risk. Starting this spring, each school will take a grassroots engagement approach with their teachers, staff, families, and community to develop a tailored learning recovery plan for summer and beyond.

We plan to integrate social emotional learning, trauma-responsive, and relationship-building supports into the fabric of the school day. This will include DCPS' Acceleration Academies for targeted supports, which will serve approximately 15,000 students. These academies will provide small-group instructional time – led by teachers or partners during extended periods. The goal is to prepare students to achieve in grade-level content by teaching foundational skills, while incorporating social emotional supports that will allow them to be successful in their future DCPS education. For our students who are most in need of support, we will offer individualized tutoring for approximately 5,000 students. We will match students with a tutor for frequent engagements that address core academic and social emotional skills.

In addition to the \$33 million for accelerating learning, DCPS will take critical steps to overcome the realities of the pandemic. We will move forward with our plan for 1:1 student-to-device ratio for grades 3-12 and a 3:1 ratio for grades PK-2, as well as provide teachers with dedicated devices. We will also



support schools with opportunities to innovate around in-person programming through outdoor learning and partnerships in support of our goal to bring all students back to school.

These investments are just the beginning of our collective commitment to build back stronger. Equity at DCPS means creating an environment in which we eliminate opportunity gaps, interrupt institutional bias, and remove barriers to academic and social success, particularly for students of color. In the months and years ahead, DCPS is focused on becoming a whole child-centered school system guided by the principles of anti-racism to re-center, re-envision, and rebuild urban education that is rooted in racial equity.

### **Conclusion**

The District is presented with the unique opportunity to reimagine systems to be more equitable, resilient, and vibrant than before. I know the DCPS team is well-equipped to support and provide for our students and families as we look to recovery and beyond.

I am grateful for our 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 DC 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.

