

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
D.C. Public Schools



Fiscal Year 2018-2019
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Acting Chancellor

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

February 26, 2019
12:00 pm
Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004



Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, members of the Council, and staff. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, the Acting Chancellor for DC Public Schools (DCPS). I am honored to testify before you today.

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2018 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. We continue to work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity. This work starts with our youngest learners, where we have expanded access to early learning opportunities, and continues through high school where we have implemented clear systems to support every student on their pathway to college and career. At DCPS, we are providing all students with holistic learning experiences that prepare them to take advantage of the growth and opportunity in every ward across our thriving city.

During my first few weeks as Acting Chancellor, I have appreciated the community's willingness to join me in celebrating our successes and critically examining our challenges. I believe we can best support the success of our students when we understand their dreams, their challenges, and their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. During school visits across the District, I have had the opportunity to speak with students from Shepherd Elementary School to Ballou High School and beyond. I am excited to continue to meet more of our students, teachers, and families and to learn more about the neighborhoods they call home.

Through [Ferebee Fridays](#), I have had the opportunity to meet with community members in Wards 1, 5, and 8. In the coming weeks, I will host these Friday events in Wards 2, 3, 4, and 7. During these engagements, I frequently hear how much DCPS families love their school leaders – from Principal Plenty at Wheatley Education Campus to Principal Brown at Eastern High School. I have also heard a desire to have a strong pathway from Pre-K through high school graduation in every neighborhood. I want to share my appreciation for the many teachers, families, school partners, and community members who came to speak with me about their schools.

As I continue my work with DCPS, I commit to partnering with parents, families, community members, and educators to set up every student for success. DCPS families and the community will have a voice in setting our strategy and defining success for our students and schools. Our next phase of excellence will be driven by elevating family advocacy and agency. Greater transparency in DCPS' decisions will become a signature feature of our public engagement. We will only succeed in this work when all stakeholders are valued, heard, and rooted in our bold solutions.

DCPS Capital Commitment Update



In DCPS' strategic plan, *A Capital Commitment 2017-2022*, DCPS set six ambitious goals to ensure all our schools provide rigorous and joyful learning experiences in a nurturing environment every day. We also aim to engage the public and ensure we are held accountable for our work, becoming a district of excellence and equity. During School Year 2017-2018, we made further progress to achieve these goals.

Goal 1: Double the percent of students who are college and career ready, and triple the percent of at-risk and students of color who are college and career ready.

DCPS has achieved steady gains in PARCC. Since 2015, the proficiency rate increased by 10.2 percentage points in ELA and 9.6 percentage points in Math. In 2018 specifically, the number of DCPS students scoring proficient increased by 3.2 percentage points in ELA and 3.1 percentage points in math, outpacing the state average. This improvement is one indicator of student success, and we continue to work relentlessly to tackle some of our most difficult issues, like closing the achievement gap and making sure that students are prepared for post-secondary success.

This year, we redesigned our Teaching and Learning school supports model to offer targeted support and build instructional capacity in our highest-need schools. Moving forward, we will continue to push resources closer to students and be proactive around college and career options for our secondary students. An analysis of the labor market and high-performing programming will frame new choices for families that are tightly aligned to post-secondary opportunities. As new career pathways are launched, we anticipate that students will be more engaged and heightened confidence in middle grades and high school will emerge.

Goal 2: 100 percent of K-2 students are reading on or above grade level.

Our second goal focuses on early literacy skills for our youngest learners. As of the end of School Year 2017-2018, 65 percent of students are meeting that benchmark. To meet our ambitious goal, DCPS teachers are focused on building language development skills beginning in Pre-Kindergarten. This year, DCPS launched the DC Reading Clinic, which provides literacy supports to elementary school students who need it most. The clinic is piloting intensive interventions, free-of-charge, to students who need additional help meeting literacy benchmarks.

As I have shared, one of my priorities is the continued expansion of early education opportunities. To close the achievement gap, we must first close the opportunity gap that occurs before students even enter kindergarten. In addition to focusing on our child literacy goals, I am committed to ensuring that early education options will be accessible and rigorous. DCPS will be the nation's bellwether for early childhood education.

Goal 3: 85 percent of students graduate within four years, and 90 percent graduate within four or five years.



DCPS strives to empower our students on their path to graduation with the supports they need to be successful. In the 2017-2018 School Year, 68.6 percent of students graduated within four years and 75.5 percent of students graduated within five years. As a district, improvement of graduation outcomes and secondary support will remain top priorities. At the secondary level, we recognize that we have work to do to ensure every young person who enters our secondary schools receives the instruction and supports necessary to succeed. We know, most importantly, the students who are not meeting benchmarks are those who most urgently need our help. To that end, DCPS has focused over the past 18 months on supporting students on the path to graduation and reinforcing for students and families the importance of attendance.

Last year, in recognition of the need for an increased focus on graduation, DCPS created a Graduation Taskforce with the goal of improving our internal systems and ensuring students received necessary supports on their path to graduation. DCPS executed on the following goals:

- Maintaining high expectations for all students and ensuring all graduates feel confident they have earned their diploma;
- Empowering students and families on their path to graduation with the supports they need to be successful; and,
- Providing clear and transparent policies with rigorous monitoring systems.

This year, through DCPS' student graduation plans, students also have access to their grades, transcripts, and credit requirements and can develop ownership over a clear path to graduation and their goals for career or college. DCPS also released updated regulations, policies, and implementation protocols related to attendance, graduation, secondary grading, credit recovery, and promotion.

In addition, we recognize too many of our young people are not consistently attending school. To be successful as a student, and in life, you must show up. The adults in our students' lives should be encouraging them to attend school every day, and we must create welcoming environments that allow all students to thrive. When outside forces hinder a student's ability to attend class, we should try our best to intervene and get them the supports they need to do so. Over the last year, we have worked to strengthen our approach to attendance, both around data collection and supports. To ensure the community remains engaged on this important topic, DCPS has shared [monthly attendance updates](#) on our website. We have seen progress, and we will continue to build upon our efforts in this area.

Goal 4: 100 percent of students feel loved, challenged, and prepared.

To measure progress on this vision, DCPS partnered with Panorama Education and Mathematica Policy Research to construct the Loved, Challenged, and Prepared Index (LCPI) based on the Panorama survey. According to results, 59 percent of DCPS students feel loved, 79 percent feel challenged, and 67 percent feel prepared.¹ DCPS provides professional learning for all educators including trauma-informed practices and culturally responsive pedagogy, all of which aim to strengthen our schools' cultures.

¹ [DCPS 2018 Panorama Survey Results](#)



Student success requires educators to focus on educating the whole child by incorporating social-emotional learning in all we do. When we ensure that students feel loved, challenged, and prepared from the moment they walk in the door, students are more likely to come to school and one step closer to being college and career ready.

Goal 5: 100 percent of schools are highly rated or are improving.

Aligned with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), our goal is for 100 percent of DCPS schools to be highly-rated or improving. While we acknowledge the work of the students, staff, and school leaders at each of the 65 schools that earned three, four, and five-star ratings in School Year 2017-2018, we know there is still work to be done to ensure every student has access to an excellent education. With the future of our students at stake, it is important that we accelerate the pace of our efforts. DCPS recognizes that every successful school improvement begins with a solid plan. For DCPS schools, this is the Comprehensive School Plan (CSP), intended to be a living document focused on priority work, aligned to DCPS' *Capital Commitment*. This year, DCPS published [CSP snapshots online](#) for each school, which allows the DCPS community to engage on the plans and goals for their school.

I also want to take a moment to celebrate DCPS' new school facilities, which align with 21st century education building standards. DCPS is dedicated to providing excellent schools that promote and support successful teaching and learning. By fully modernizing each building, we are ensuring each facility will last for decades to come. In fall 2018, DCPS opened five new buildings or programs. Each of these buildings provides our schools with state-of-the-art learning environments that will inspire our students and staff to continue to innovate.

Goal 6: 90 percent of students re-enroll and DCPS serves 54,000 students.

I know our students and schools can be most successful when our community is invested in their collective success. I am proud more families continue to trust DCPS to provide their children with the opportunities and support they need to thrive. In School Year 2017-2018, 84 percent of students re-enrolled with DCPS. DCPS has not exceeded 49,000 students since 2007. As of fall 2018, our enrollment has grown at almost every grade level, bringing enrollment in DCPS to over 49,000 students, up by 850 students from the prior year.

As part of this goal, in fall 2018, we launched Excel Academy – DCPS' first all-girls school. Led by Principal Pritchard, Excel Academy, located in Ward 8, supports young women in reaching their full potential. Excel Academy scholars receive personal development and leadership skills, sisterhood, and confidence through enrichment opportunities and a rigorous academic foundation preparing them to succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

As we look towards next year, DCPS is excited to add over 500 seats through our new programs and schools, like Bard Early College, and expanding Pre-K. This growth is responsive to



community feedback and will increase access to rigorous, high quality programming for students across the city.

Conclusion

DCPS remains focused on providing an excellent and equitable education for all students, both inside and outside the classroom. We have seen three consecutive years of PARCC growth and will continue to invest in bold, data-driven initiatives to build on this progress. We know that we can best support our students when we work in partnership with families, communities, and other agencies. In all of our work, we will continue to demonstrate our commitment to our students, our educators, and our community. I would like to thank Mayor Bowser for her unwavering support for DCPS and the Council for your continued partnership. We appreciate the opportunity to share our accomplishments and plans for continuous improvement. The DCPS team and I are happy to address your questions at this time.

