

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



Fiscal Year 22-23
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools

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

March 3, 2023



Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Council, staff, and community members. I am Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, Chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today to discuss DCPS' comeback. I want to begin with heartfelt gratitude for the teachers, principals, staff, students, and families of our incredible school communities.

Let me begin by thanking our hardworking teachers, who deserve our enormous respect and appreciation. When I visit schools across the city, I have the profound privilege to see our teachers in action: cultivating inclusive environments where all students are seen, heard, and encouraged; meticulously reviewing the work their students produce to identify where misunderstandings persist in order to adjust their instruction for the next day, practicing their instructional delivery with colleagues to support students in accessing rigorous content; and leaning into professional development to ensure their approaches align to the latest research on how students learn and develop. We are so grateful that our teachers continue to choose DCPS. On average, **we have retained over 92% of our Highly Effective and Effective teachers over the last three school years.** I am also proud that we have reached a historic agreement with the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU) to ensure our dedicated educators are compensated as the professionals they are. With this historic contract, **our educators will receive a 12 percent increase in salary, effective retroactively,** a four percent retention bonus, and \$60 dollars per hour in administrative premium for all of the additional contributions they make—leading clubs and coaching sports, contributing to curriculum revisions, and offering additional learning time to students. We are also pleased to honor the dedication of our school leaders by reaching a robust agreement with the Council of School Officers (CSO) to **provide our school administrators with a 12.5 percent increase in salaries over four years.** In recognizing the commitment that often includes long hours, principals and assistant principals will receive an annual extra duty stipend of \$5,000 dollars.

I firmly believe the school leaders of DCPS set the standard for the nation—their commitment to serving our young people is unparalleled. We have so many principals who led through the pandemic and continue to sign up to serve at DCPS - like Courtney Wilkerson who served as the



principal of Sousa Middle School since 2016 and is continuing their leadership journey as principal of Roosevelt High School this year. Or Charlette Butler-Strickland, who has devoted more than a decade of service to Hart Middle School and continues to innovate in partnership with families to improve the daily experience for her students. Or Brigham Kiplinger, who has established Garrison Elementary School as a model site for the implementation of the science of reading. Or Semanthe Bright, who in her tenure has taken Coolidge High School from a school of 300 to the thriving program of over 1,000 scholars today.

And, in particular, I want to recognize the families of over 50,000 students enrolled in DCPS, the highest number since the 2019-20 school year. **As the only district in the region with rising enrollment, it is important for me to thank our families for choosing and supporting DCPS.** I am especially proud that at the high school level, more 9th and 10th graders are learning at DCPS than ever before. When the *Washington Post* asked parents about their children’s own schools this time last year, 80 percent rated them positively overall. We are proud to have earned this level of trust.

Let me say to our entire community: it is an honor to lead this phenomenal school District.

Holistic Pandemic Recovery

As we recover together from the pandemic, our approach to acceleration is grounded in our commitment to serve the whole child. Each of our schools is leveraging strong relationships and grade-level curriculum for *all* students coupled with targeted supports tailored to individual student needs. We’re intentional about keeping track of what each of our students need – from tutoring to health screenings – and offering differentiation that goes beyond core content.

Our expanded Summer Acceleration Academies further advanced this goal. We provided full-day, well-rounded experiences with both academics and enrichment for students. This coming school year, our schools will invest seven million dollars in federal pandemic recovery funding for evidence-based acceleration programming, such as extended learning opportunities and high impact tutoring. We are also ensuring these supports are targeting the students who will most benefit from them. Over 60% of students who received high-impact tutoring or attended a DCPS Acceleration Academy began the year well below the grade level benchmark. By the end



of the year, nearly 60% moved up at least one grade level in math and over 50% moved up at least one level in reading from beginning to end of year.

We know the pandemic disrupted students' daily access to key support structures and resources, and across the nation there is both an increased demand for mental health services and very real trauma that informs the actions and lives of too many of our young people. The over 400 school-based mental health providers play a key role in proactively supporting student social-emotional needs every day. When it comes to student safety, we also believe contract security guards and our school resource officers are critical members of the DCPS community. Ask our principals and students, and they will tell you – our resource officers know our communities – they know our students' names and their families, and they can leverage their relationships in case of emergency. Additionally, our Central Services team provides crisis response support for communities who have been impacted by violence.

Academic Achievement

As a school district, ensuring all of our students have access to and are successful with well-rounded and rigorous content that sets them up for success in college and career is our paramount goal. We deeply believe that when we invest in research-based curriculum, resources, and support, there is no limit to what our students can achieve. For example, DCPS has made tremendous strides toward our goal of having the most expert educators when it comes to the science of reading. We know that our youngest learners need systematic and explicit teaching in phonemic awareness and phonics alongside developing language comprehension. DCPS created a series of 120 original decodable texts – books that strategically reinforce key phonics lessons – written in partnership with DCPS teachers. The characters in these texts mirror our student demographics, and the stories and illustrations include references to DC landmarks like Ben's Chili Bowl and Kenilworth Gardens. When we combine texts that reflect our students' lives with high quality support for teachers through our own DC Reading Clinic and partners like American University and Literacy Architects, we set our students up for early literacy success. On our measure of early literacy skills, students made significant growth last year and are on track to do so again this year. Our mid-year early literacy



scores are well above where we were at this time last year. In literacy overall, we have gained back much, though not all, of the ground lost during the pandemic, with subgroups with the most severe pandemic learning loss making the most progress. **Our NAEP data from 2022 showed that DCPS was one of the very few urban districts not to decrease in performance, maintaining our status as the large urban school district with the most literacy progress in the past decade.** We are confident we will continue to expand on the foundation we have established through our early literacy investments.

Furthermore, we are excited to leverage some of the lessons we have learned from this work as we prepare for an increasingly intentional focus on math, grounded in best practice research. At DCPS, I have challenged my team – we must all become “math people” and cultivate a culture of numeracy for our young people. This year, we began our focus in math with an emphasis on our secondary students, adopting Illustrative Math, a top-rated curriculum that centers students in the learning experience and engages them in challenging grade level content. Early indicators are positive. **In grades six through eight, the percentage of students performing on or above grade level at middle of year increased in all three grade levels from school year 21-22 to school year 22-23,** and we have returned to pre-pandemic levels. As we plan for next year, we are adopting a structured math curriculum for pre-kindergarten to ensure our youngest learners have developmentally appropriate opportunities to develop their number sense. We are also prioritizing opportunities for elementary school students that strengthen fluency and provide a clear foundation for Algebra I readiness in middle school. We are excited to come together with school leadership teams this summer for two days of learning focused on key math concepts that support these priorities.

Life-Changing Partnerships

DCPS continues to be a place that attracts life-changing partners to the work. Last year, Johnson Middle School joined ten other DCPS schools as a Connected School, where students have access to basic needs closets, food security resources, and other core services. Johnson received additional funding to serve as a hub where community partners provide resources such as music enrichment and clinical services. **I am thrilled that all our middle schools East of**



the River now offer these expanded supports as Connected Schools to aid student well-being.

We are excited that this year, we were awarded a \$2.5 million dollar grant from the U.S.

Department of Education to expand this full-service model to Turner and Hendley Elementary Schools.

This year we also began an exciting, multi-year partnership with XQ Institute to reimagine the high school experience. **DCPS is the first school district to receive a partnership commitment for all high schools.** Dunbar and Cardozo were selected as the first redesign cohort. Cardozo's school focus will be on preparing students for financial liberation through the development of entrepreneurial skills. Dunbar's school focus is Afrofuturism; students will experience cutting-edge immersive technology and field experiences. We cannot wait to support *all* of our high schools as they develop their unique, bold ideas to reimagine the high school experience.

Where We Are Headed

We are proud of our progress to date, and we understand there is work to be done to ensure every student has the support they need to succeed. Our last Capital Commitment spanned 2017-2022. During this time, **we saw steady improvement in our PARCC performance with a 15% increase in overall PARCC proficiency for English Language Arts and a 11.5% increase in math since 2015. We also saw an increase in the percentage of students who graduate within 4 years, from 64% in 2015 to over 73% in 2022.** While the last five years have been marked by progress, we know the pandemic impacted educational outcomes everywhere, and DCPS is no exception.

This past summer, we began developing our next strategic plan, which will focus our agency's work for the next five years as we drive to improve outcomes for all students. Throughout the fall, we hosted an online survey and over thirty listening sessions with educators, students, staff, families, and community members. Through these engagements, we heard from our community about their concerns, hopes, and expectations for how DCPS will serve them in the years to come. We also heard from several members of the Council, and we appreciate your



partnership. We are now in the process of drafting our next five-year strategic plan, which has been informed by the feedback we have received to date.

We are eager to continue engagement with our community to ensure every student is succeeding academically, feels connected to their school, and is prepared for post-secondary success.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

