

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)**



Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee
Chancellor

Before the
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

April 7, 2023
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and Committee of the Whole. My name is Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee, and I have the honor of serving as Chancellor of DC Public Schools (DCPS). Thank you for the opportunity to come before the Council to discuss Mayor Bowser's fiscal year (FY) 24 budget.

As a district, we have spent the last three years responding to and recovering from the pandemic, making the strategic investments needed to reopen safely, advance a steady recovery, stabilize our school communities, and support students with the greatest needs.

I am pleased to share today that the investments we have made in our schools are working. Over 60% of students who received high-impact tutoring or attended a DCPS Acceleration Academy began last year well below grade level. 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. While we are excited to see these early results, we know that recovery from a once-in-a-lifetime, global public health emergency takes time and sustained focus.

Further, DCPS is the only public system in the region to grow its student population post-pandemic, with our highest enrollment since 2007. A strong public education system is the cornerstone of a thriving community, and we are proud to support the mayor's vision for DC's comeback.

DCPS' Budget Puts Students First

DCPS' school funding model puts students first by explicitly driving funding to students who need it most. At the same time, our model balances our shared value of stability in several ways, stabilizing all schools at 95% of their FY23 budgets inclusive of one-time funds and performing key checks to ensure sufficient funds are allocated for core operations. This allows us to continue to stabilize schools with enrollment declines while also adequately supporting growing schools like Coolidge and Woodson High Schools.

Further, to support our continued recovery from the impacts of the pandemic, our model adds an additional \$10 million through the Mayor's Recovery Fund to DCPS schools to ensure a thoughtful step-down of recovery dollars. Additionally, since initial budgets were released, DCPS allocated an additional \$9.6 million directly into school budgets during budget development. These additional funds are reflected in schools' submitted budgets available on dcpsbudget.com, where we also have posted a downloadable spreadsheet of all FY24 submitted school budgets.

At the school level, we are investing \$35M more in school budgets in FY24. This means 233 more full-time employees in our schools, and specifically, 114 more teachers who will be compensated at highly competitive rates, reflecting their critical role in students' futures.

To deliver on our commitment to equity, DCPS allocated \$11.4M in at-risk dollars to DCPS *on top of* the approximately \$73 million allocated to schools through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula.

An example of how our model works is what we see at Moten Elementary School, where 90% of the students served by the school have been designated at-risk. Funds that flow through our model support Moten’s ability to offer high-impact, intensive tutoring to every single student. With a similar student body demographic, Stanton Elementary School has hired additional staff to better meet their students' unique needs. Across DCPS, schools are able to fund partnerships with trusted tutoring organizations and pay their own staff to provide direct tutoring—over 100 DCPS schools are currently providing High Impact Tutoring.

As I have said before, no amount of money is too big of an investment for our young people. At the same time, the economic realities we are facing as a city dictate that some schools *will* experience decreases in their overall school budgets next year. I want to be clear that there are only three reasons a school’s budget could decline:

1. The first reason is because the school is projected to have a decrease in overall enrollment that justifies a decrease in funding.
2. The second reason is because the school is projected to serve a population that will have fewer needs for special education, language acquisition, and services for students who meet the definition of “at-risk,” – *even if the overall school enrollment is increasing.*
3. The third reason is because as a city and as a District, we must thoughtfully step down one-time funds related to pandemic recovery to avoid a drastic fiscal cliff in FY25.

I am so thankful that as a city – even in a tough budget year – we all agree on the importance of supporting our public schools. I believe that we have more in common than we disagree on, and DCPS looks forward to continuing our work with the Council in service of students and our shared values of stability *and* equity.

Transformative Capital Investments

Mayor Bowser’s FY24 proposed budget also includes over \$2.71 billion in funding for DCPS within the District’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to design and construct modernized school buildings and improve school facilities through small capital construction projects.

We are thankful that this administration and the Council continue to prioritize modernizing our district’s school infrastructure and improving schools across the entire district. Our students and staff are deserving of these state-of-the-art facilities that create joyful conditions for teaching and learning and spark students’ intellectual curiosity.

In alignment with the *Planning Actively for Comprehensive Education Facilities Amendment*, or *The PACE Act*, DCPS was able to add three new modernization projects to the FY24-29 CIP: Beers Elementary School in Ward 7, Excel Academy in Ward 8, and Bruce-Monroe at Parkview Elementary School in Ward 1.

In addition, DCPS will utilize funds for additional construction and infrastructure projects that will have a transformative effect on our ability to provide a high-quality education to all our students, including:

- Cafeteria renovations for Plummer Elementary School in Ward 7, Hardy Middle School in Ward 2, and Coolidge High School in Ward 4;
- Dining and physical education space at the Kenilworth swing space in Ward 8;
- Upgrades to DCPS technology infrastructure within schools, including completing our refreshment of smart board technology systems in classrooms;
- \$6 million in upgrades and enhancements to school life safety hardware, including interior keys; and
- Investing \$30 million in the development and support of swing spaces district wide, which will allow us to remain on track with ongoing modernization work.

Coordinated Central Services

In closing, I would like to share just a few examples of the critical services our Central Services team provides. Every day, our team works in service of students managing core operations such as safety and security, student data systems, attendance and enrollment, and family engagement. Our central team also supports students' academic experiences by writing curriculum, managing grant funding, and supporting key partnerships that enrich student programming daily.

DCPS is especially proud of our Central Services Cluster Support Model, which was launched in Fall of 2019 to increase coordinated, direct support for schools. Each of our 116 schools is strategically grouped into 9 clusters, each led by an Instructional Superintendent and supported by a Cluster Support Team (CST) of experts in the fields of literacy, math, special education, operations, attendance, and restorative practices. Cluster Support Team Members provide direct services, coaching, and professional learning in alignment with school needs and goals. Last school year, our schools received nearly 10,000 visits from CST members. Visits can include model lessons, data analysis, direct coaching, or professional development sessions. Each year we measure principal perception of the model to gather feedback and drive improvements. Feedback about the model is overwhelmingly positive. As of Fall 2022, 77% of principals agree that *"The Cluster Support Team coordinates effectively to provide integrated supports to my school."*

Thank you to the Committee of the Whole for its continuous partnership as we work together to invest in our students and our collective future. I am so proud to lead this incredible school district of brilliant, ambitious students, their dedicated teachers and school leaders, and all the central and school staff who work tirelessly to ensure joyful learning experiences for all DCPS students.

I am happy to answer your questions at this time.