



# Washington Teachers' Union

***Amplifying the Voice of DC Teachers***

*Elizabeth A. Davis, President*

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## DC City Council

### Joint Budget (Fiscal Year 2021) Oversight Hearing: Committee on Education & Committee of the Whole

June 4, 2020

Testimony of

Elizabeth A. Davis, *President*  
Washington Teachers' Union  
AFT Local 6

The novel coronavirus and the subsequent school closures have made clear that schools play an outsized role in our community — they are so much more than places to learn. Schools provide vital nutrition, physical safety, mental health and critical developmental supports to tens of thousands of students across the District every day.

Rodney King, Malice Wayne Green, Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor.

George Floyd.

These names are a call to action. They remind us that – as W.E.B. DuBois said “A system cannot fail those it was never meant to protect.” It is time that we embrace change and move beyond simple rhetoric.

I am a teacher. I believe our students are only limited by the opportunities that we provide them. Our school systems should be the great equalizer. Our schools must be a place where students can come and learn, a place where they can rise up and achieve. Unfortunately, here in the District of Columbia, we have a two-tiered system of education. And the inequities and the gaps are continuing to grow. Today, I call on you to make the changes needed to ensure every student – regardless of their zip code or luck in the lottery – receives a high-quality, well-rounded education.

Good morning. I am Elizabeth Davis, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). The WTU represents 5,000 active and retired teachers. We are dedicated to social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia and to improving the quality of support, resources, compensation and working conditions for the public servants and proud teachers who educate our students. Many of our WTU members live and pay taxes in the District and have kids or family members that attend DC schools. I am a DC teacher and DC resident.

When Mayor Muriel Bowser made the decision to close our public schools and move to distance learning earlier this year, it was to protect the lives of our students, teachers, school staff and school leaders. It was the right choice. However, in spite of the dedication and best efforts of our teacher members, far too many students in the District of Columbia are stymied in reaching their full potential because of the barriers they face in our schools and in our communities. The novel coronavirus has highlighted these gaps and while we are thankful for the support the Mayor provided to our school systems in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget, we continue to dramatically underfund our schools and opportunity gaps regardless of how you measure them continue to grow.

The achievement gaps (see Appendix 1) that have become apparent across our city during this crisis are not new. We have long known that they have existed; they impact the achievement of our students and the success of our teachers and schools. As we emerge from this crisis, we hope to work with our city's elected leadership to re-examine the impact that the chronic underfunding of our public school systems and that the digital divide and opportunity gaps have on student achievement. We hope that we can reform teacher evaluation systems to promote teacher retention and professional growth. We also hope to continue to move de-emphasize federally-mandated standardized tests as a key element of our school accountability system. We also believe the city needs to embark on a series of reforms to put our by-right, neighborhood schools on an equal footing with public charter schools.

District of Columbia Public Schools serve as the backbone of our system of education in the city. As the WTU looks at the FY2021 budget, we are looking for investments that are equitable and prioritize closing the achievement gaps that plague our city. We believe our city's FY2021 education budget should (1) ensure our teachers and students are safe when we reopen schools for in-person learning; (2) ensure equity, and high-quality, well-rounded education for all students; (3) provides supports for and the retention of our teaching workforce. The WTU also believes that the budget process should not be utilized to make sweeping policy changes that benefit the public charter sector at the expense of our public schools and the students that choose them.

I want to express my **opposition to provisions in Mayor Muriel Bowser's FY2021 Budget proposal that freeze wages for DC Government employees** for a period of four years. We recognize the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have on the ability of the DC government to maintain a balanced budget; however, the decision to eliminate annual salary increases of the workers, many of whom are first responders during this pandemic, not only is unjust, but also interferes with the collective bargaining process as provided in DC Code, Section 1-617.17.

To help speed our city's recovery, we should be investing more in our workforce not less. As you are well aware, several labor unions have negotiated enforceable collective bargaining agreements that provide for wage increases for FY2020 and beyond. During negotiations, labor and management make certain concessions designed to reach an agreement on all compensation issues. Wage increases are only one aspect of these agreements. It is well established that labor may make concessions on annual wage increases in exchange for improvements elsewhere in an agreement. It is wholly inappropriate to excise one piece of an agreement through a rushed legislative process with limited public debate. Moreover, excluding by legislation the opportunity to negotiate annual wage increases for the next four years abrogates the collective bargaining process. There are other methods to balance the budget, including efforts to increase revenue that are more appropriate and avoid unilateral usurpation of the collective bargaining process.

**The WTU does not support Subtitle (IV) (B) – Education Facility Colocation Amendment Act of 2020** which would allow public charter schools to use space and co-locate in DCPS facilities where space is underutilized and believes this provision should be removed from the budget. There are great schools, waitlists, and unfilled seats for both DC Public Schools and schools in the public charter sector. For DCPS, a total of 9,268 individual students were waitlisted 25,540 in the lottery for the 2020-21 school year. Across sectors, there are nearly 20,000 unfilled seats. These data does not indicate that we need more seats – we need better seats. Rather than moving an ill-informed initiative that will continue to dilute resources and erode the quality of education that some receive, the Council should revisit the Master Facilities Plan and provide funding for the development of an updated Master Facility Plan to guide the city's space usage decisions, across both sectors, and to help guide decisions on the opening and closing of new schools.

DC's dual system of schools of right and charter schools is costly. It features duplicative offerings, disrupts enrollment patterns, and creates instability. **The WTU also recommends that the Council provide funds to the Office of the D.C. Auditor, to conduct a study of the costs incurred to taxpayers of opening and closing schools in the District, and to place a moratorium on the opening and closing of new schools** until we have an understanding of the needs and costs of school openings and closings. If the Council chooses to enact new policy in the FY2021 budget, we recommend moving forward legislation that has already

received public hearing, including the ***Public School Transparency Amendment Act*** to ensure all Local Education Agencies in the District of Columbia are subject to the same laws and regulations concerning transparency and accountability to District tax payers.

## Returning to School

Whether it takes place in August, later in the fall or next year, teachers, parents and community members across our city are looking forward to the day when students can run through the doors of our city's schools and once again give their teachers a hug to start their day. We need to ensure that our FY2021 budget allows for our schools to prepare for this day. Given the realities surrounding the planned phased reopening of our city and our schools, the WTU believes that we need to begin planning – and budgeting for – a hybrid approach to education in the District. This means that we need to begin preparing plans and aligning resources to ensure that we can provide both in-person and Distance Learning in the coming school year.

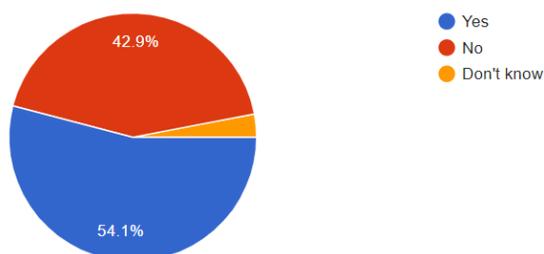
As we begin planning for the reopening of our schools, the WTU has convened a Taskforce of nearly 200 teachers who have developed a series recommendations to ensure that teacher and students are safe as we reopen our schools. We will be finalizing and releasing the report these teachers are preparing in the coming weeks. Many of these items will be reflected in our testimony today.

## Ensuring our Teachers & Students are Safe

As we prepare for the reopening of our schools, we'll face many new challenges. And we need to be cognizant of the demographics and needs of our workforce as we move forward. In various surveys, the WTU has found that a high percentage of our city's teachers are at risk of or care for someone who is at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Additionally, many teachers have young families for whom like so many others they rely upon our schools to help care for while they're at work. We must be sure to make accommodations for these teachers and their families.

Are you or someone you live with at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19? Factors for higher risk include: People with chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, immunocompromised, severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher), diabetes, chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis, or liver disease.

564 responses



As we've begun the process of engaging teachers around the challenges of returning to in-person learning, they've raised many issues around the public health measures that they need to feel comfortable returning to our school buildings. Their concerns largely mirror public health guidelines and the concerns of parents and students. Teachers want to see substantially reduced community transmission, widespread testing, and an effective treatment or vaccine. They've also raised a number of other issues that we hope that you can ensure DCPS addresses prior to reopening our schools.

- **Facilities.** Teachers raised a number of on-going concerns about the health and safety of their school facilities, even during the best of times. Many teachers cited chronic issues with rodents and mold, conditions that may have been exacerbated by the long period of school closures. We hope that all buildings will be thoroughly cleaned and that maintenance of air circulation systems can be prioritized this summer. The cleaning and maintenance of air systems especially significant given findings that the coronavirus can be spread through air ducts.
- **Security.** As we consider plans to reopen schools, we may need to have multiple entry and exit points to schools and staggered start and dismissal times for students and staff. This may result in a need to deploy security personnel in a different manner and extend their hours of duty. *The WTU would recommend that schools start outside of traditional hours to limit the exposure that students and staff have while utilizing public transportation to arrive at their school.*
- **Testing supplies and increased Health Care staffing.** All teachers and staff should be required to test negative for the coronavirus prior to re-entering a school. A qualified health care professional should also be on-site at every school to monitor the health of students and staff and make decisions about the health of any individual.
  - Should an individual teacher be exposed, that teacher should not be penalized and forced to take sick-leave during any period of quarantine; additional staffing or funds for substitute teachers may be required to ensure any in-person teaching duties are met.
  - Additionally, we'd recommend the Council **increase wages for substitute teachers**, which haven't received an increase in over a decade, and consider **waiving barriers to recently retired teachers returning to the classroom** as substitutes.
- **Public Transportation.** Concerns around the safety of public transportation were highlighted by teachers as a barrier to returning to school and DCPS needs ensure that all schools will have adequate parking plans in place, perhaps through the extension of the Daytime School Parking Zone Act.
- **Classroom Space & Furnishings.** Teachers raised concerns that classrooms in all buildings are not adequate size to allow for social distancing, further raising concerns about the inclusion of language to allow for the co-location of Charter Schools in DCPS facilities. Teachers requested that furnishing more appropriate to support social distancing be put in place prior to the return to school and guarantees that the need for additional classroom space will not hinder a student's access to art, music, PE and other "inner core" courses.
  - DCPS should also work this summer to outfit classrooms with new furniture, shields and other physical barriers to limit the potential spread of the disease once schools reopen.
- **Purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies.** During early phases of reopening, both teachers and students should be required to wear PPE at all times. DCPS will need ensure that schools are well stocked with PPE, cleaning supplies, and hand sanitizer and should any school run short of any of these supplies it should be required to close immediately.
- **Subsidies for teachers who care for children.** According to our preliminary research, up to approximately 60% of our teaching workforce care for students. Their schedules will need to align with those of their children and provide flexibility for them to continue to provide for their families. Given the difficulties of managing schedules across grade

levels, schools, Local Education Agencies, and jurisdictions, childcare services will need to be available for our teaching workforce.

- **Data infrastructure.** Tracking the amount of specialized services our special education students are receiving is a challenge during normal times. A remote learning instructional model can be cumbersome and require intensive parent participation and without proper tracking places the District in jeopardy of failing out of compliance with federal regulations. Currently, there is not a uniform way to track specialized instruction hours and we recommend the implementation of a universal data tracker that all relevant stakeholders (admin, case managers,) can access and share.

These examples are not meant to be an exhaustive list of the additional costs of reopening our schools, while ensuring the health of our teachers – and our students – and give us an idea of the scope of the challenge that we’ll be facing. We encourage the Council to hold a public roundtable to discuss the challenges and explore the reopening plans in detail with each local education agency, as well as teachers and other public witnesses. Again, as the WTU Taskforce on Reopening Our Schools completes its work, we’ll make our full report and list of recommendations available.

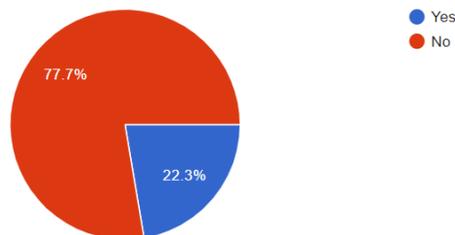
## Ensure Equity, a High-Quality Education for All, & the Digital Divide

Well-resourced DCPS schools of right in every neighborhood are a key to the recovery of communities from COVID-19, providing stability, excellent education, food, consistent rules and rights, and needed resources. The Washington Teachers’ Union is thankful to the Mayor for her commitment to public education in light of the current fiscal crisis gripping the nation and the District of Columbia; however, we do not want to leave the impression that the budget proposal is adequate to meet the needs of students across the District.

The budgeting process is full of choices. Yet, in a survey of our teachers, the vast majority who responded do not believe their local school budget meets the needs of their community prior to considering the impacts of COVID-19. Additionally, many reported that information on the budget was not shared to teachers by school leadership, that LSATs were not required to meet to discuss budget changes, or that LSATs were not, contrary to DC’s Open Meetings Laws, open to the public. ***We ask that the Council works with DCPS to ensure they follow Open Meetings Act requirements and ensures that all LSAT documents are released to the public, as required.*** This will give our communities greater insight into the impact that COVID-19 has had on our school budgets.

Do you believe your local school's budget is sufficient to provide for the educational and social-emotional needs of your students next year?

564 responses



In 2013, the District selected The Finance Project (TFP), a Washington, DC-based social policy research and technical assistance firm, in partnership with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA), a Denver-based education consulting firm, undertook an education adequacy study. The FY2021 budget continues to fall below the recommended level in the DC Education Adequacy Study (Adequacy Study), the education budget has failed to grow in pace with rising personnel costs, and DC Public Schools cannot fully fund its staffing model without supplanting funds intended for students who are considered “at-risk” of academic failure.

As we look at the FY21 budget, we ask the Council to ***ensure schools educating the highest percentages or numbers of our at-risk students are not cut and are provided additional supports to address digital divide issues, food insecurity, lack of access to high-quality health care and behavioral support, and lack of special education services.*** These schools, and communities, have been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and they have struggled due to underfunding and misspending of the city’s at-risk funds.<sup>i</sup>

The impact of budget shortfalls on our individual schools is severe. It limits their ability to invest in the programs and services they need to improve student outcomes and boost enrollment. In the words of teachers and LSAT members from a school that serves high numbers of economically disadvantaged and special education students and has seen enrollment growth but has still seen increased test scores:

Basically, we have to make cuts each year, and this is not sustainable long-term. We have opted to swap a classroom teacher for a math interventionist for next year. So basically, we’re making 3 homerooms out of 4 so that we can keep the (a) reading specialist and (b) math interventionist. Providing targeted supports to students who are behind grade level has proven successful and the school is determined to continue doing so. However, as we have made cuts each year, and nearly all of our staff are tied to classrooms or sped numbers, we won’t be able to keep these supports unless one of them is funded in future budget allocations. (And we’re already at the point of swapping out essential classroom teachers.)

We were also hit by loss of Head Start funding. As a result, we lost an ECE aide, supplies (including diapers), and an instructional coach for our 6 PK teachers, which was centrally funded under Head Start. We felt the loss of the instructional coach for ECE teachers in particular, as our instructional coach couldn’t add 6 teachers to her load, and funding an instructional coach is expensive.

The District of Columbia has made a choice to underfund our schools for many years. We’re thankful for the increase our schools received this year; however, the WTU does not believe that our local schools should have to choose between classroom teachers and supports that have proven successful in closing literacy and math achievement gaps. These same false choices apply to other aspects of a local school’s budget as well.

In far too many cases, whether or not a student has access to a fully-funded library program. During the 2019-2020 school year, DCPS library media specialists spent a considerable amount of time partnering with teachers to provide meaningful literacy or technology based learning experiences. During #DCPSatHome virtual learning, this work continued at a higher level as they continued to inquire, curate and support instruction. Library media specialists were seen on

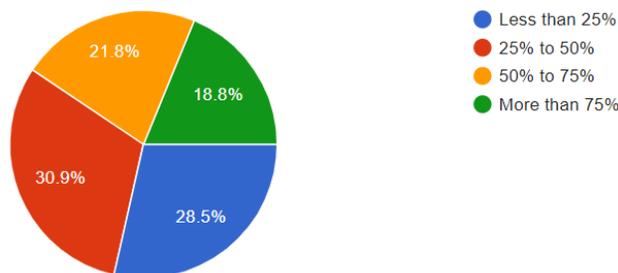
the front lines training students, teachers and parents on the use of various digital tools and platforms to support the virtual learning experience.

Overall, the support of library media specialists is a critical element and has aided in the academic achievement of students across the District. There's no denying that library media specialists have had a major contribution to DCPS being named a leader of urban school districts with academic gains in reading for the last three years. Whether it be in a face-to-face or virtual setting, full time library media specialists skills adds to the learning experience and provides social emotional support for students and support of classroom instruction compliments their classroom teacher colleagues. Yet, a student's access to a library program is largely determined by a students' economic circumstances, zip code, or lottery results. In Ward 3, all DCPS schools have a full-time librarian on staff. In Ward 6, 16 of 18 schools have full time librarians.<sup>ii</sup> Yet, of the 20 DCPS schools in Ward 8, 7 will not have a librarian on staff and an additional 4 will only have the position funded on a part-time basis. This is not simply inequitable; it is unjust.

Equity takes other forms as well. And as we consider this budget, knowing that our students will likely continue Distance Learning in various forms, we must ask ourselves if we are doing enough to bridge the Digital Divide. We asked our teachers last week how many of their students were regularly logging on to complete assignments during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. The results are shocking, but are not surprising given what we know about device and WiFi access across our city.

What percentage of your students were regularly logging in during the 4th Quarter?

564 responses

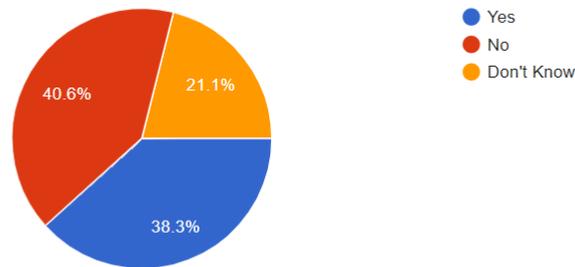


We know that many factors play a role in this and while we appreciate the efforts that the city took to fill this void, we were slow to respond and our response was insufficient. Far too many students continue to lack access to a computer for Distance Learning to continue.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, the Chancellor was asked about device distribution during an ANC meeting and reported that DCPS has distributed just 10,000 of the 16,000 devices they purchased last year.<sup>iii</sup> Thus, it's logical to assume that DCPS still retains thousands of devices. Yet, when we asked teachers if their students who needed a device had received one, at least 40% of our respondents indicated that they had students who did not receive a device.

Did all students you teach who needed a device to access on-line learning platforms, receive a device from DCPS?

564 responses



***We call on the Council to hold an oversight hearing on the Device Distribution and to uncover the needs in our community as we move forward into the 2020-21 school year.***

In this budget, we need to change our approach to Distance Learning. Currently, DCPS is planning a simple continuation of their Empower Learning Initiative (ELi). This is insufficient in an environment where we should be planning for the continuation of Distance Learning for a vast majority of our students during the 2020-21 school year. We ask the Council to fill the gap. We join with Digital Equity in DC Education in calling on the Council to enhance the DCPS budget to adequately support a hybrid learning model for 2020-21. To provide instructional continuity and reduce learning loss next school year, students in grades K-12 should be provided with a computer that they would use for both home and school learning. This would require DCPS to accelerate its 3-year plan to reach a 1:1 student-device ratio. As such, ***we urge the Council to find an additional \$11 million for computers to ensure that all students in grades K-12 begin next school year with computers for in-school and at-home learning.***

This investment will accelerate the city and DCPS' commitment to move to a 1:1 student-device ratio through the Empowered Learners initiative (ELi) while meeting the current challenge of re-opening schools and safely educate DC children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Council should also work with DCPS to ensure IT support for home learners, through real-time phone and chat methods. Outside of the Education Budget, we encourage the Council to fund efforts to bridge the Digital Divide and ensure expanded WiFi coverage in underserved communities.

Another area of concern in the budget relates to cuts to the federal Head Start program. Earlier this year, DCPS announced that they would forgo applying for federal Head Start funding for the 2020-21 school year, due to concerns about their ability to meet program requirements. ***We reiterate our calls for the Council to hold an oversight hearing made on April 16<sup>th</sup> on the DCPS decision to forgo the application and the impacts that it will have on individual school budgets and the services provided to eligible students.*** While DCPS has indicated that allocations to local schools will not shift as a result of this decision, local school budgets have largely failed to keep up with rising costs and inflation in recent years resulting in cuts at the school level. Last year's budget (Fiscal Year 2020) saw 20 DC public schools, including 17 in Ward 7 or Ward 8, face steep budget cuts. The WTU was extremely concerned with initial budget allocations for the upcoming school year (Fiscal Year 2021) – while not fully released and subject to change due to the public health emergency – which were insufficient to maintain current programming across all schools. As we've spoken with local school employees, we're

concerned that many students will no longer receive the programs and supports needed to succeed. As one school official reported:

Due to ECE budget cuts, we lost an ECE classroom. We also had to combine a 1st and 2nd grade classroom to keep our math interventionist. We had to cut our Dean of Students, who primarily handles school culture and behavior. Without this position, I'm not sure how our students will get this support.

***The WTU believes that we must continue to provide high-quality programming and wrap-around services for all Pre-K programs in the District.*** While the current public health crisis couldn't have been predicted when this decision was made, our city and many others across the nation will face budget challenges in the coming year. The District shouldn't be leaving federal resources on the table.

Outside of the Education budget, we're deeply concerned about the impact of the loss of funding to programs designed to ensure the safety of our students. As of last week, there have been 61 homicides in 2020, a 5% increase from 2019, which experienced the most homicides in DC in the past decade. **We must fully fund violence prevention programs across our city.** *Specifically, we are concerned with the reductions in funding proposed for the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, OAG's Cure the Streets program, and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants which grants funding for trauma support services and domestic violence prevention.* We hope you'll work with your colleagues to ensure funding for these programs are sustained.

### **Provide Supports for Teachers and Encourage Teacher Retention**

Teacher turnover is a significant problem in the District of Columbia. In its October 2018 report and its report update the D.C. State Board of Education (SBOE) found that average annual teacher attrition at the school level in both District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools is—and has consistently been—about 25 percent. This is significantly higher than the national average and is higher than other urban jurisdiction.

And, ***we know that Teacher Turnover is most deeply felt in communities of color and communities with high percentages of students classified as at-risk.*** The DC SBOE found that the rate of annual teacher departure rises with the percentage of students considered at-risk. The District's teachers leave schools with fewer than 20 percent of at-risk students at an annual rate of 18–20 percent while schools with the highest percentages lose almost a third of their teachers each year.

While some – event members of the Council – have indicated that a certain level of turnover is a positive. I stand here to strongly refute that notion. Our students benefit from deep, lasting relationships with our teachers. And our teachers, especially those new to the profession, need support to allow for growth. High teacher turnover undermines student achievement and consumes valuable staff time and resources. Research published by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) shows that urban districts can, on average, *spend more than \$20,000 on each new hire*, including school and district expenses related to separation, recruitment, hiring, and training. Teacher turnover also contributes to teacher shortages throughout the country, as

roughly 6 of 10 new teachers hired each year are replacing colleagues who left the classroom before retirement. It is time that DCPS engages with the WTU in an effort to reduce this unsustainable rate of teacher turnover. It has a significant impact on our city's spending and our schools' budgets. We believe there are some ways that the city can reduce teacher turnover with funds in the FY2021 budget.

**Teacher turnover begins with the city's IMPACT evaluation system.** DC Municipal Regulation § 1-617.18 prohibits DC Public Schools evaluation systems from being a subject of collective bargaining, making labor-management collaboration impossible on this crucial element of any effort to improve our public schools. ***And, we again, call for this committee and the Council to pass the "Equitable Evaluations for D.C. Public Schools Employees Act," introduced by Councilmember Trayon White, that would mandate that teacher evaluation systems be a subject for negotiations between DCPS employees and DCPS administrators.*** It is time that we end the link between the evaluation of our teachers and the opportunity gap that plagues our city. We again call on the Council to adopt the "Equitable Evaluations for D.C. Public Schools Employees Act."

As families and educators face growing economic anxiety and stress, public services become strained, and students cope with isolation from their friends and other support systems, investments in mental health resources will be essential. ***The Mayor's budget allocates an additional \$1.5 million for mental health services in schools. We support this additional spending, however, we need to ensure the funding is spent appropriately and efficiently.*** The Washington Teachers' Union supports the Council's adoption of the Fair Access to School Amendment Act; however, we've been disappointed by the lack of funding and support in the implementation of the Act's requirements. Over the past year, teachers have reported an increase in low-level behavioral infractions and a lack of coordinated response by school administrators. In a sense, we've thrown up our hands and said "there's nothing we can do." While we strongly support efforts to institute restorative justice practices, they need to be fully funded and implemented with fidelity across a school environment.

As we seek to expand the mental health services, we must place a renewed focus on our teachers. Their mental health is critical if they are to help students. City leaders should build on the success we've had in expanding school-based mental health supports for students and ensure that school staff are trained to adequately support students' social-emotional needs. Further, the city should be intentional about protecting and expanding resources and support in schools and neighborhoods that have been hit hardest by the virus, particularly given the disproportionate death rate in DC's Black community.

As we prepare for next year, teachers will also require professional development that is interactive, practical, and provides them with working knowledge of the content delivery platforms and applications that DCPS Central is choosing to support distance learning. We hope DCPS will partner with the WTU in determining which platforms are best for different grade levels and student abilities. While the funding appears adequate in the proposed budget, the professional development offered to teachers needs to be reformed to include more flexible and include more teacher input. Council should hold DCPS accountable for providing teachers with the tools and supports to effectively navigate online learning. Without needed supports, we risk overwhelming teachers and contributing to the teacher turnover problem.

## Additional Reforms in the Budgeting Process

**We join with the Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities (C4DC) to call on the Council to address structural inequities that disadvantage DCPS.** LEA funding structurally disadvantages DCPS. The DCPS budget is based on a modest projection (around 2%) over expected October enrollment to address midyear arrivals and churn. Charter LEAs are funded based on October enrollment, despite the fact that more than 1300 students leave charter LEAs after the audit. While charter LEAs retain nearly \$25 million associated with those departing students, DCPS doesn't receive funds for students it will serve as a result of that churn. And the cushion in DCPS to address midyear arrivals and churn is even smaller (1%) in the proposed FY21 budget.

- Provide at least a 2% allocation in the FY21 budget for DCPS midyear arrivals and churn, to enable DCPS to more fully serve its students with the greatest needs, who are often at schools experiencing the greatest churn. See [here](#) under Adjusting DCPS Enrollment.
- Close the disparate funding gap for maintenance and operations (M&O). DCPS typically pays more than \$1000 per student in UPSFF funds for M&O, while charters pay \$500 per student. This disparate treatment fiscally disadvantages matter-of-right schools on which our communities rely. See [here](#) under A More Equitable Way.

## Concluding Thoughts

Reopening our schools will require a substantial commitment of time, energy and resources. The WTU stands ready to work in partnership with DCPS and other city leaders to ensure that our teacher's and student's health needs are met and that students can continue learning despite the many challenges that we will face. However, we must also be realistic.

We cannot expect to utilize the same rubrics for evaluating teacher effectiveness or student achievement during a pandemic or when utilizing a hybrid model of in-person and remote instruction. And, as a city, we need to begin to address the systemic barriers that prevent our school systems from achieving the results that we desire. It is time that our city embarks on a process that includes robust stakeholder engagement to design a plan for our public school systems. We should not move forward with co-location of facilities until this plan is complete and the city has adopted a master facilities plan and has improved the governance and oversight of our school systems.

The FY20201 budget contains a needed infusion of dollars to meet the challenges of educating the diverse student body of the District of Columbia, but it is not enough to close the gaps and ensure that every student is able to access the same high-quality, well-rounded education. We commend the Mayor for her efforts to hold public education harmless in this pandemic and the associated revenue reductions. However, the public education budget still falls short in meeting the technology and socio-emotional needs of our students, and we ask the Council to invest more in these areas. And, we hope the Council will make additional funds available to ensure the health needs of our teachers and students are met as we learn more about what will be required to reopen our schools.

The WTU stands ready to assist in any way possible. We encourage the Council to exercise its convening authority to bring DCPS, teachers and parents together to design plans to reopen our schools and to exercise its oversight authority where needed to ensure spending priorities align with needs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

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**Many individual Schools submitted brief remarks as we prepared for today's hearing. Their statements are included below.**

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We were also hit by loss of Head Start funding. As a result, we lost an ECE aide, supplies (including diapers), and an instructional coach for our 6 PK teachers, which was centrally funded under HS. We felt the loss of the instructional coach for ECE teachers in particular, as our instructional coach couldn't add 6 teachers to her load, and funding an instructional coach is expensive.

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Distant learning offers many benefits, but it is not quite the same as the behaviors and social interaction we would have from our students in a physical setting. The biggest challenge our school faced this school year with the transitioning to Distance Learning was attendance, lack of support, feelings of isolation, discipline (structure/ routines), as well as navigating technology. Additionally, the Math Interventionists and one of our six Early Childhood Classes were removed from the 2020-2021 budget, and as a result, our enrollment will decline, and a teacher and paraprofessional will be affected.

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Prior to distance learning, our school's LSAT decided to remove one art position and one music position (we currently have two of both) due to a limited budget allocation and the desire on the part of administration to bring in a NAF (National Academy Foundation) Academy for XXXXXX as an expansion of our XXXXXX Academy. This decision required shifting money to new teaching and technology support positions. With the new revised budget, our principal was informed, much to his surprise, that locally funded staff travel would be reduced by \$3,000 and conference fees would be reduced by

\$15,818. Our principal expressed dismay at this, considering that there was much boasting in the media that no cuts would be made.

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What most accurately defines our school during every DCPS budget season can be summed up in one word: overlooked. Despite meeting the enrollment projections for the year, despite being designated as a DC All-Star school and despite being recognized as one of the schools which provide both a DC diploma and certification upon graduation, budget season is a sour reminder to every administrator, teacher, parent, and student that it's not enough. Every effort to meet expectations and every success in achieving and exceeding those expectations still leaves us falling short when it comes to being able to provide necessary services and supports to our students.

It's with deepest frustration and bitterest regret that this year we were forced to reduce our psychologist position by one half and our ELL instructor by one half. Initial losses to our budget included a Dean, Assistant Principal, MSL, 1/2 a librarian, and 1/2 a guidance counselor. That our family should console themselves with the loss of two invaluable school members instead of five is repugnant. Desperate repeated pleas, midday runs to the Mayor's office, twelve hour meetings, sixteen hour work days and still two lost positions. Two too many.

I dread the fall when our students need emotional support for distance learning from a psychologist who may not be there. I dread the fall when our EL learners may need to both adapt to online learning with English as a second language in eight classes during their first year of high school and there's less than one full position to fulfill that need. I dread the fall when I feel as though my students are barely seen by the District while they're sitting in my classroom, let alone behind a screen.

A system which pits schools against other schools to compete for limited resources should not boast of equity. A Comprehensive Staffing Model designed as a "one size fits all" model to solve school budgeting would be denounced by any educator as bad pedagogy. Leadership that claims the value of transparency as "paramount to success" should not be conducting a closed door session about budget. And a budget that leaves its students, teachers, and staff feeling overlooked is a just a fair reminder that they are undervalued as well.

Our school is not unique in their budget woes. And it is our belief that that fact, above all, is an indicator of the need for change in a broken system that is failing not just its hidden gems, but all schools. And given the unprecedented circumstances of our future as a school system, our teachers' ability to educate, and students' accessibility to learning, full funding for all schools should be a non-negotiable in the present if we intend to preserve our future.

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I wanted to share some of the concerns that our school has with the budget. We have several students that are new to the country. However, we only have one ESL interventionist to work with these students. The classroom teachers are doing their very

best to ensure they can participate with their peers by using lots of visual supports and other research based strategies.

This year the teachers even asked administrators to provide training on how to best support newcomers. However, with all the support provided by the general education teachers, it is not enough for students that are learning the English language for the first time at a higher grade. Newcomers need extra support from an ESL teacher to help them learn the English language, as well as a supportive general education teacher to teach grade level standards. Another concern that our school has is that we have barely enough special education teachers to provide services to all of our students. When a special education teacher is on medical leave, it leaves the other special education teachers with a heavier workload. This means that some students may not receive all of their hours, which also means that the amount of time that special education teachers have to collaborate with general education teachers decreases. The current teachers allotted for the number of special education and newcomers is below what is needed. We don't think the percentage takes into account all the different schedules and needs of different students. We would ask that this be increased in future budgets.

## Appendix 1.

District of Columbia PARCC Results	State ELA % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	26.7%	30.5%	33.3%	37.1%	10.4%
White	74.3%	82.0%	82.1%	85.0%	10.7%
Black	19.3%	22.0%	24.7%	27.8%	8.5%
Hispanic	24.7%	28.9%	32.0%	37.3%	12.6%
Asian	55.7%	66.2%	71.6%	74.0%	18.3%
At-Risk	13.2%	15.8%	18.4%	21.1%	7.9%
English Learners	13.8%	1.5%	18.8%	19.7%	5.9%
Students with Disabilities	5.4%	4.8%	5.7%	7.9%	2.5%

PARCC Scores	State Math % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	24.8%	26.9%	29.4%	30.5%	5.7%
White	71.0%	75.5%	78.8%	78.8%	7.8%
Black	17.4%	18.6%	20.7%	21.1%	3.7%
Hispanic	22.0%	28.2%	28.2%	30.5%	8.5%
Asian	59.7%	64.5%	69.8%	69.4%	9.7%
At-Risk	12.9%	14.2%	15.7%	16.3%	3.4%
English Learners	18.5%	21.2%	20.9%	22.7%	4.2%
Students with Disabilities	6.4%	5.3%	6.4%	7.2%	0.8%

Source: <https://osse.dc.gov/parcc>

<sup>i</sup> D.C. Schools Shortchange At-Risk Students. June 25, 2019. <http://dcauditor.org/report/d-c-schools-shortchange-at-risk-students/>

<sup>ii</sup> Miner Elementary (which is eliminating its librarian in the FY21 budget) and Van Ness Elementary (1/2 time librarian) do not have full time library programs; Brent Elementary is budgeted for a Library Aide rather than a licensed and certified Librarian to lead its library program.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://twitter.com/Evan\\_Yeats/status/1265424967640010755](https://twitter.com/Evan_Yeats/status/1265424967640010755)